Word Balloons

the magazine of the comic arts

no. 1

$1.00

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WORD BALLOONS number 1, March, 1974, is published approximately quarterly. Subscriptions are 3 issues for $3.00, a savings of absolutely nothing. Other top-quality magazines of fantasy and comic art from FANTAGRAPHICS PUBLISHING COMPANY are: FANTASTIC FANZINE SPECIAL II: $2.00 per copy; THE ROBERT KLINE PORTFOLIO: $2.50 per copy. When ordering, please make all checks and Money Orders payable to FANTAGRAPHICS PUBLISHING COMPANY.

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the Editor's Balloon
Gary Groth

What is this publication you're reading, this WORD BALLOONS? Just what is it, anyway?

Well, it's not a fanzine. And more specifically, it's not a FANTASTIC FANZINE.

Fanzines are amatuer publications produced for fans by fans. FANTASTIC FANZINE was a fanzine, and I thought a damn good one, while it lasted. It had one of the longest runs of any fanzine -- from September of 1967 to July of 1972 -- almost 5 years. It was for me, as well as its readers, an escape of sorts, as all entertainment is to some extent. It was my love and my life for those years. I had a lot of fun with it and I'd like to think all the people that worked with me -- people that I felt really *were* working side-by-side with me even though many of the books' contributors lived thousands of miles away from the magazine's heart here in Virginia -- had a lot of fun with it too.

One of the almost undefinable qualities of FANTASTIC FANZINE was the genuine enthusiasm of everyone involved -- the contributors, the artists, the writers, the readers, and myself -- but in the time of the last FF, the comics scene has changed, and so too has many of FF's long list of contributors. Contributors like Dave Cockrum who is now a fast moving professional comic artist; Martin Pasko, who is now writing for National Periodical Publications; Bob Kline, who is doing commercial work on the west coast, as well as blessing us with a few pieces of underground comix work; and many, many writers and artists who have gone into different directions and still regard their comics-related work as a trip into a pleasure-world, a world where they can let their uncensored and un-commercialized imaginations run wild.

Although one of WORD BALLOONS' goals is to keep that subtle romance between the creative people of this magazine and all its readers burning, WB will be very different from the FANTASTIC FANZINE of old. I'd like to think one of the reasons for the snowball enthusiasm of FF was my honest attitude towards the magazine and its readers, which I expect to continue with WB. As I mentioned previously, WORD BALLOONS won't be a fanzine. We'd like to be able to think of ourselves, at some future time, as a trade publication of sorts. THE COMIC READER, which calls itself the "TV GUIDE of the comic book industry" is heading in that direction -- more because a lot of professionals in the industry get some of their information first hand from it than for any other reason. But still, it is fan-oriented. It still commits the basic dishonesty of glorifying everything produced in the comic industry. This industry still lacks a publication --and in most cases, a P.R., that honestly and openly represents it to the fans in the same terms in which it thinks of itself; a business.

This issue is a good starting point in that direction. In this, our first issue, we have many voices from the people in the comics industry. A Neal Adams interview; transcriptions from panel discussions and keynote speeches at comic conventions involving such people as Denny O'Neil, Archie Goodwin, Jim Steranko, Len Wein, Ted White, Gerry Conway, and Marv Wolfman. This magazine will concern itself with what's happening in comic books. Hopefully it will offer incisive features that will examine the workings of the business realistically. We'll approach comics as a business as well as an art. So, we will concern ourselves with the hows and whys, the here and now, and the dollars and cents of comics.

WORD BALLOONS won't be limited to transcriptions from conventions and essays about comic art; we'll include material that most comic art afficionados will appreciate; fiction, stories, satires, reviews. We'd like to include material of that type, not just by professionals or semi-professionals, but by talented amatuers that may not have had the exposure they deserve. Obviously, we can't print *everything* by every fan; but we're thrilled to receive all kinds of material -- illustrations, strips, essays, stories, etc. -- from fans that would like to see their work appear in WORD BALLOONS.

Before I forget completely, WORD BALLOONS has a business side as well as a creative side to it. Many readers have ordered subscriptions to FANTASTIC FANZINE, which haven't yet expired since they went beyond the last issue published [FF SPECIAL II, or the equivelant of FF 14 and 15]. Some subscriptions, in fact, go all the way up to FANTASTIC FANZINE 20. I will honor all FANTASTIC FANZINE subscriptions, as well as the few FANTASTIC FANZINE NEWSROOM subscriptions still active with a current subscription to WORD BALLOONS. To be as fair as possible, if you have an odd amount of credit totalled from your subscriptions to FF and the FF NEWSROOM, I will absorb the loss of the difference, i.e., if you've ordered FANTASTIC FANZINE 14 and 15, and FF NEWSROOM 12 and 13, a total monetary value of $2.40, I'll send you WORD BALLOONS 1, 2 and 3, a monetary value of $3.00. If this subscription juggling is unacceptable to you, I will refund anyone's money who writes me and requests it. I have gone through our mailing records and have totalled how many issues of WORD BALLOONS those that have subscribed will receive in this manner; the number of the last issue of WORD BALLOONS you will receive by this subscription method is typed on your address label.

Next issue, I'll try to give you some insight as to the origin of WORD BALLOONS, and what to expect in future issues. Next issue will be larger with a somewhat tightened format. You can expect a greater diversity of material next issue also. Much of this issue's contents have a timeless quality, but I still felt they should be published in the first issue as opposed to spreading the material out over the first three issues. Next issue, we'll present Jim Wilson's intriguing story, DARK ANGEL, which acts as a sequel to his last piece of fan fiction, THE ANDERSON INCIDENT, which appeared in FANTASTIC FANZINE SPECIAL II. You can expect an in-depth interview with one of the outstanding comics personalities in the field, articles, art, reviews, and more. I hope you'll join us.

GARY GROTH

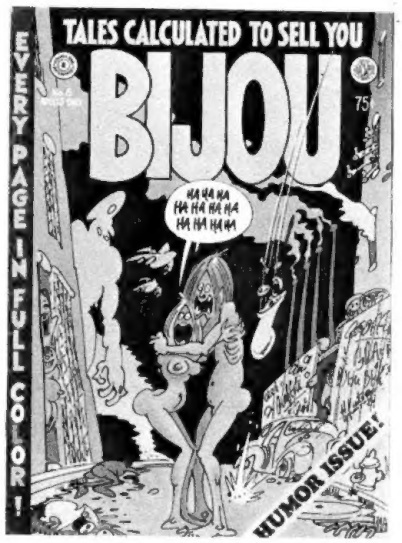
REVIEWS REVIEWS REVIEWS

BY MIKE CATRON

Bakersfield Kountry Comics
Larry Welz and Larry Sutherland
Last Gasp Eco; 36 pages, color covers; 50¢

"I have laid down truths that will piss off the natives."

Welz and Sutherland have created a thoroughly enjoyable book that anybody who grew up "different" from the rest of the zombies in his home town will readily appreciate. The funniest (and, presumably most offensive to Bakersfield residents) piece in the book is "Bakersfield As I Lived It" ... or "HIT THE ROAD JACK N' DONCOMBACKNOMO'NOMO'NOMORE," a combination history and commentary on the town, with a page each devoted to violence and sex in Bakersfield. There is also "Shoot-out at 7/11," an account of a drug raid by the local constubulary, "Gearjammer," the exploits of a long-haul trucker, and Chuck and Eddie in "Bakersfield Blues," wherein two high schoolers (drawn remarkably similar to Bob Montana's "Archie" characters) go partying in good old you-know-who's-field. In all, this is a funny, well-done comic and comes highly recommended.



HAROLD HEDD # 2
Rand H. Holmes
Last Gasp Eco; 36 pages, color covers; 50¢

"Hah! Little do they realize that they're dealing with a true paranoiac!"

The first HAROLD HEDD was a novel experiment for comix -- a tabloid that sold for $1.00. Unfortunately, I did not get the chance to read it, and I understand it is now out of print. At any rate, the second issue, printed in the standard comix format, is indeed a gem. The inside front cover is a highly amusing comedy piece about obscenity, "Police should be Obscene and not Absurd." The remainder of the book is one story ("Wings over Tijuana") detailing the adventures of Harold, buddy Elmo, and a very sexy young lady named Simone who attempt to fly three thousand kilos of marijuana from Mexico to Canada. In the course of the story, Harold manages to dodge rent and bill collectors, talk his way out of a pool room brawl ("Couldn't we just fuck instead?"), shoot it out with Mexican bandits, engage in aerial combat with the US Air Force, drop a load of dope over downtown Vancouver, and (what else?) get laid. Holmes' storytelling ability in comics is put to good use in this book, although the few balloons that are partially obscured by scenery are annoying. But the expert blend of adventure and humor make such minor faults easily forgivable.

With this issue Rand H. Holmes has established his credentials as one of the leading comix artist/writers.

GOOD JIVE # 2
Grass Green, Art Bevaqua, Sandy Sande
Poo Bear Productions; 36 pages, color covers; 50¢

"God, you smell like you've been riding in a shit truck!"

I must confess an unshakeable bias! I think Grass Green is *the* funniest underground cartoonist, bar none (Crumb included)! This issue starts off with another Hobo Hal adventure in which Hal rescues a damsel-in-distress -- and gets his just rewards. "Stupid Stud" goes MIDNIGHT COWBOY one better when two unemployed Viet Nam veterans hit on a scheme for making money that has the ladies fighting to buy the services of one of the pair's equipment. "An S.O.S. from Space" takes ROMEO AND JULIET, transports it to an other-worldly situation, and gives it a happy ending. "Myrna" gives us a sequel to a story that appeared in GOOD JIVE # 1 about an aspiring cartoonist and his coming of age. Finally, "Keeper of the Graves" relates a murder story that, while somewhat weak, nonetheless comes off well. Highly recommended.

HIGH ADVENTURE # 1
Bob Kline, Mike Royer, Stephen Leialoha, John Pound [art]; Mark Evanier, Mike Royer [scripts]
Krupp Comic Works; 36 pages, color covers; 50¢

"Those guys must have a mental cripple doin' their research."

It is good to see comix coming out of their infancy. There are several titles now devoted to serious themes instead of the constant humor and gag titles that birthed the industry. HIGH ADVENTURE is one of KITCHEN SINK's attempts at serious comix and if not for the abyssmally wretched scripts, the book might have succeeded.

It's not a total failure, however. Bob Kline's whimsical, tongue-in-cheek approach to panel storytelling is the high point of the book, especially the lead story, "Nimbus," about an interstellar whorehouse tycoon.

Mike Royer wrote and drew "Anniki," an easily forgettable story about a bare-chested female Conan, captured by an old hag, bent on exchanging bodies with Annikki to regain her lost youth.

"Lord Sabre," illustrated by Leialoha and Pound is predictable and typical of stories where a dull office worker engages in Walter Mitty-ish daydreams about a swash-buckler -- he gets the girl and punishes the nasty villain.

"Winged Challenge," too, is an unimaginative story, and even Bob Kline's artwork is largely uninspired on this one.

The main fault of the book is obvious: Mark Evanier's scripts. All the stories except Royer's "Annikki" were written by Evanier. Throughout, he maintains an astonishingly consistent level of inept unoriginal and just plain *bad* writing. Frankly, I don't see how he had the guts to put his real name on the stories. The only thing that even makes the book worth buying is some of the art. I've already mentioned Kline; the influence of Royer's stint atm inking Kirby is readily apparent; Leialoha and Pound's creeping professionalism shows promise, and their references to Ditko were satisfactory.

BIJOU FUNNIES # 8
Jay Lynch, Skip Williamson, Dennis Kitchens, Robert Crumb, Harvey Kurtzman
Krupp Comic Works; 36 pages, full color; 75¢

"I gotta go blow up a McDonalds... Death to the oppressors!"

The underground comix movement has finally produced its own version of the early MAD. Despite an over-reliance on Kurtzman's original format, BIJOU # 8 nonetheless contains very good satire of popular underground comic characters and their artists (several of these characters have appeared in previous BIJOU's).

Among the line-up: Those furshlugginer Fuzzy Geek Brothers, Melvin Natural, Pard'N'Nat and Melvin Wizard (in which "the greatest wizard who ever walked da' face of this crummy planet" is revealed to be the chief resident of Okefenokee Swamp). Even if you are only marginally familiar with comix, you will still be able to enjoy at least some of the, in-many-cases, excellent satirizations. But on a more serious note, the inside front cover of the magazine carries a full page editorial on the famous Supreme Court pornography ruling of June 1973. As everyone knows by now, that decision has thrown the whole comix industry (among others) into a quandry and the Krupp editorial on the matter points out several frightening local interpretations of obscenity. Among this country's many other problems, the threat to Constitutional guarentees of freedom of the press stands at the fore -- and there is no relief in sight.

LAST GASP ECHO FUNNIES; Box 212, Berkley, California 94701
KRUPP COMIC WORKS; Box 5699, Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53211

ARCHIE GOODWIN: COMICS IN CRISIS

PREPARED FOR PUBLICATION BY MIKE CATRON

It's no secret that we are living in highly uncertain times. Each morning's newspaper brings us news of yet another outrage, crisis or shortage. In addition to our concerns as citizens (Watergate, Energy Crisis, Oil Shortage), we as comic art fans have to consider the effects of the paper crisis on our hobby.

For the past several months, primarily through such publications as THE COMIC READER we have heard of the paper squeeze put on publishers in general, and comic book publishers in particular. This has already resulted in higher prices, lower print runs, cancellations, and reduced frequency. Yet amid all the excited jabber, wild rumors, and speculation, one voice comes to us with some perspective for understanding the paper shortage.

Thanksgiving weekend, 1973, Archie Goodwin spoke on this vital topic to a gathering of comic art fans at the opening of Metro Con '73.

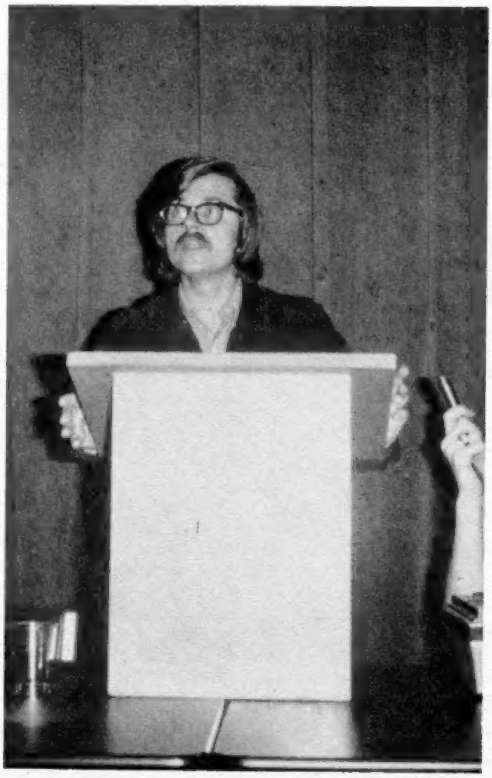
Among those in the audience of the University of Maryland's Student Union were Howie Chaykin, self-proclaimed punk, and good natured genuis, Steve Hickman, whose Metro Con insignia graces this page, Jeff Jones, who needs no introduction, Al Millgram, Marvel artist, Steve Mitchell ("Don't call me Baby Conan!"), Marty Pasko ("Don't call me Pesky!"), Denny O'Neil, comics writer, Walt Simonson, MANHUNTER artist who grew up in the shadow of the University of Maryland campus, and Berni Wrightson, who had just announced his departure from SWAMP THING.

Typical of all Metro Cons, the atmosphere was friendly, relaxing, jovial and open. Archie spoke with several fans before being introduced, and concluded his speech with a long question-and-answer period.

When the final applause had died, Walt Simonson was awarded a plaque proclaiming him "Rookie of the Year" by the University of Maryland Comic Arts Society, Metro Con sponsors. Then the Society presented Berni Wrightson, Len Wein, and Joe Orlando with a plaque in recognition of their excellence of achievement on SWAMP THING, with Berni accepting on behalf of the other two. The ensuing applause threatened to deafen those present.

On this page and the next, WORD BALLOONS presents the text of Archie Goodwin's Metro Con Keynote Speech.

M.C.



I'd like to start off by drawing your attention to the fact that you are witnessing a miracle -- a very small miracle, nothing on the water - into - wine scale, although that doesn't look like a half-bad idea. It's not one of your basic big-league miracles -- I don't want to bring Billy Graham or Oral Roberts down on me. But I did want to point it out, while I try to calm myself down enough to get on to the major part of the speech.

You see, there are any number of ways you can categorize people who work in comics. There are those who write and there are those who draw. There are those who ink with a pen, there are those who ink with a brush. There are those who think Certs are a breath mint and there are those who think Certs are a candy mint. *[Laughter]*

But the most *basic* category is: There are those who meet deadlines... and there are those who don't. *[More laughter]* Unfortunately, I'm one of the latter. The biggest problem for *most* editors in the field is: Can they get the material from their artists before it's due in the production department to go to the engravers?

In my case, it's: Can the artists get the material from *me* before it's due in the production department to go to the engravers?

I'm not really the all-time champ at this. Neal Adams, who has a much greater flair for publicity than me, is most often granted the honor of all-time champ at being late, but I'm right up there. In fact, one of the best ways to make the head of the production department really turn green and double over with a bleeding ulcer, is to suggest the idea of a monthly book, to be editted and written by me, and drawn by Neal. *[Laughter]*

So, given the fact that I was told that this keynote speech was scheduled for November 23, at twelve noon, and it's only 12:35 now, and given my penchant for missing deadlines, the miracle -- you remember the miracle -- is that I'm actually standing here giving the speech right now, instead of speaking to an empty auditorium at about 4:15 in the afternoon on the weekend after Christmas. *[Laughter]*

Now, having exhausted this one small piddling miracle, the only thing I have left to offer you is a crisis. Probably in the last few days, and maybe even in the course of traveling to the convention you were affected by something called "The Energy Crisis." Well, what comics are currently facing is similar in many ways. It's a Paper Crisis. And, unfortunately it is not quite as small as the miracle I offered. In fact, I was very much tempted to do the speech this way:

THE STATE OF COMIC BOOKS TODAY: [Rasberry]
And then I was going to throw the whole thing open for questions. *[Laughter]*

Fortunately, the crisis is not really *that* bad, but it is going to have a big effect on what you're buying and reading, so I think it's worth going into.

Okay. How did the Paper Crisis happen? Contrary to popular belief (and to the immense relief of a lot of dogs) we haven't run out of trees. But we are in a situation where the demand for paper keeps growing, but the possibility of increasing the raw materials to *produce* paper doesn't. Someone summed it up by saying: "Every tree that's grown is known."

In other words, an explorer is not going to suddenly stumble on a vast forest that can be chewed up into pulp paper. It's a situation that has really sort of always existed and probably is always going to exist. But, like the Arab oil restrictions finally brought the Energy Crisis to a head, a number of factors all

of a sudden came together to give the publishing field the Paper Crisis.

First, the paper mills were caught short. They base what they produce for a given year on advance orders they receive from publishers. Publishers, generally, are very optimistic about all the new titles they are going to bring out, so they order a lot of paper. But then, when it gets down to the time when they're going to actually get the paper, they take a hard look at all their projects and they see a lot of things they can cut back on, so they take less than their original estimate.

Now, paper mills have come to count on this. The excess paper can be kept as a reserve or it can be sold to Eurepean markets. It's like airlines over-booking a flight because they know there are always a number of cancellations. But, this year it didn't happen. Everything everybody ordered they really wanted. So, no reserve.

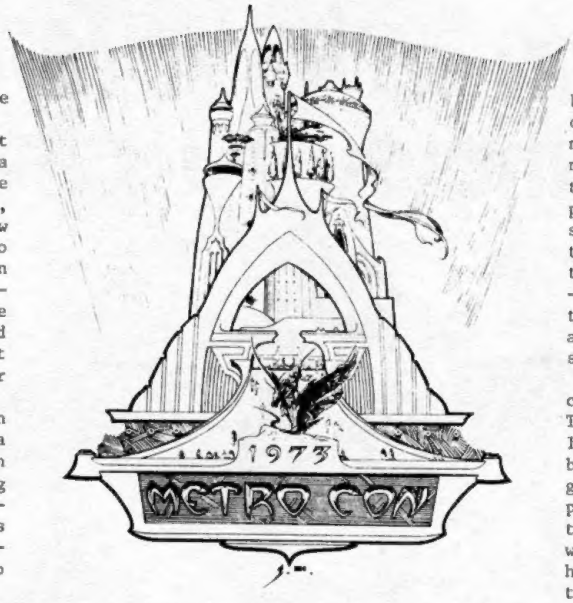
Added to that were strikes -- strikes of workers at paper mills, strikes of railroads that ship the paper to printing plants. Added to *that* was the devaluation of the dollar which made it too expensive for U.S. firms to go to European paper producers and get material to offset shortages here. At the same time, again because of the dollar devaluation, the United States became an attractive place for Europe and Japan to buy paper from. Naturally, paper mills are more than willing to sell it to them at a higher price. So that adds to our paper shortage.

All that pretty much guarentees a crisis. Besides those trees I mentioned earlier, there are other factors that make it very likely the crisis situation is going to endure for a long time. The United States currently consumes ten-million, five hundred thousand tons of newsprint every year. Now, newsprint is what comics are printed on. Paper mills in the U.S. and Canada are already producing newsprint at their maximum capacity. But statistics indicate that U.S. consumption *increases* at an annual rate of 2.9% while the rest of the world increases their consumption at a rate of 4.3%. New paper mills, and new machines that can convert raw pulp into paper just aren't being built. And even if they *do* start building the machines, it takes them two-and-a-half to three years to get a machine that is fully operational and capable of producing paper.

So, we've got a paper crisis and it's going to stay around, it's not going to disappear. Okay. What's this done to comic books?

Well, it's made Underground comix almost non-existent. Of course, the undergrounds had a little help from the ruling on obscenity made by Nixon's Supreme Court. His administration may have a little bad luck in choosing presidential aides, but they're sure as hell going to keep the rest of us moral. Anyway, production of new underground material is almost nil. A lot of firms, like Dennis Kitchen's KITCHEN SINK ENTERPRISES, are going out of business.

Now, World Color Press, which prints almost all of the mainstream comics, with the exception of Gold Key and Charlton, has ordered everyone to make a 20% cutback in what they are producing. That's reflecting itself in different ways: DC has been cutting down the number of titles and frequency of publication of some titles; Marvel has cut down the number of editorial pages per book, and they are also cutting down their print runs -- print runs are the number of copies of each title that get printed.



Metro Con '73 symbol
by STEVE HICKMAN

Charlton, first of all cut their production in half -- all their monthlies became bi-monthlies, all their bi-monthlies became quarterlies. And now, I understand, they're actually going to suspend production completely for a month or two.

Now that's grim. It's grim for the people who work in comics because they are going to be scrambling a little harder to *get* that work. And it's grim for you because some of the comics you care about are going to disappear or become harder to get.

But, like the man says, "I've got good news, and I've got bad news." Now, here's the *bad* news... *[Some rather uneasy laughter]*

No. I'm kidding. But the good news is a little hard to find, and it's not necessarily totally pleasing once you get it out of the dust and hold it up to the light to take a close look at it.

Comic books are a little like dinosaurs; they do not adapt to change very easily. Hopefully that analogy won't ever run its logical conclusion. Comics *have* changed over the years, but always because they are *forced* to; rarely because anyone *plans* for them to. They began as low-cost, high-volume items and publishers generally don't look beyond them being anything but that -- something they print a lot of and make a very small profit on. But, because they print so many of them, they get by. That's always been the publishers' attitude.

Now, because of the things I've been talking about, they are being forced to move away from that concept, to a small degree. So, you are starting to see sixty cent and one dollar books from DC. You're seeing seventy-five cent black-and-white, and sometimes color, books from Warren. And you're seeing a lot of twenty-five cent titles from Harvey and Archie.

Like I said, they are being *forced* into doing this. And like anything done under pressure, there is a lot *wrong* with the final product. Most are still very much chained to a large-scale distribution, where you have to print 300,000 copies of a magazine, just to make sure enough finally find their way to the newsstands to sell 150,000.

To minimize the risk, to keep the break-even point as low as possible, corners are cut. Most of these new-sized magazines are padded out with reprint material. So, what it works out to, is that instead of taking the best shot possible at this new thing, everyone is sort of backing into it, and at the same time, half-trying to keep a foot in on the old standard twenty-cent comic book -- which used to be the old standard fifteen-cent comic book, and the old standard twelve-cent comic book and the old standard ten-cent comic book.

But I believe all this still has to come. I don't see any way around it. There's got to be higher priced books. It's going to be painful, it's going to be slow coming. Companies and people are going to get hurt. But, whatever the package, prices are going to keep getting higher; printing and paper costs will guarentee that. As a result, what has to happen, is that readers are going to become more selective. The day when they will buy all the titles of one line or pick up a book just because they think the cover is exciting, have to be numbered.

And I think that greater selectivity is the small nugget of good news. It should force individual books to be better tailored and better done for their particular audiences. They cannot be produced at the same old breakneck, "win-some, lose-some" rate. So, there will have to be time to do a proper creative, as well as physical package. What we have been doing up to now in a monthly, twenty-cent book just won't be tolerated by someone who is having to pay three to five dollars for a book that is only coming out on an annual or semi-annual basis. And I think that's good.

During the last five years or so, there's been an influx of really promising young talent into the comics field. Many of them are at this convention. Many of them are even sitting in this room. And some of them aren't, Howie. *[Laughter, applause]* Unlike many time's in the past when new talent came into the field because there was a boom and work was easy to get, regardless of ability. The young artists and writers coming in now do so because comics are something they *like*, something they really, truly *want* to do.

And it shows in their work. It showed in Roy Thomas and Barry Smith's CONAN comic. It showed in Len Wein and Berni Wrightson's SWAMP THING. It shows in Denny O'Neil and Mike Kaluta's SHADOW. And it showed in Howie's IRONWOLF, too. *[Laughter]* The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. *[More laughter]* And it shows in a lot of work produced by the dedicated old pros as well.

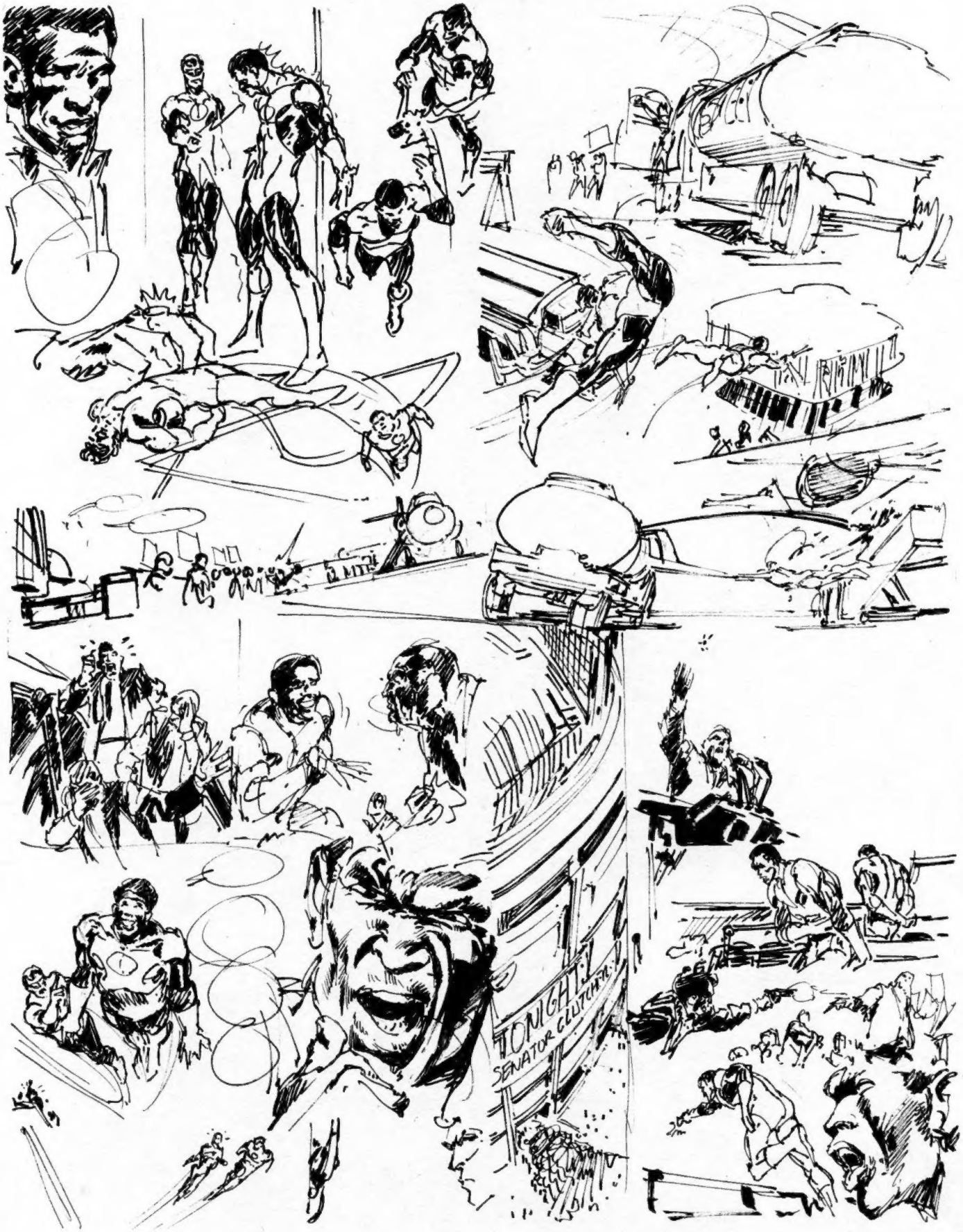
It shows, but under present production standards it cannot be sustained. After a few good issues, the books either begin being late, or the personnel changes; the work becomes watered down. Given the circumstances under which comics are produced, now, that's inevitable. Given the changes I've been talking about, the day may come when it *won't* be.

And that is the hope I see in all this. It may be a false hope. Comic books may *really* be dinosaurs; comics may just be very pleasant, very trivial things that no one will want to support for much more than a dollar. Any changes may be coming too little and too late. But if they are not, if even *some* of what I mentioned is possible, then I want to be around for it... and I want to be *part* of it.

Thank you. *[Applause]*

Interview With NEAL ADAMS

CONDUCTED BY MARTIN PASKO



WB: How do you conceive of Neal Adams the comic book artist; what's your self-image? Do you see yourself as artist or craftsman; illustrator or storyteller; what?

ADAMS: I see myself as a craftsman; I see myself as a storyteller—

WB: Craftsman as opposed to an artist?

ADAMS: Well, I don't know what an artist is. I never thought of myself as an artist, because nothing ever came easy. I'd always kind of assumed that artists were people that God came down with the magic wand and went "plunk!" and said, "You're an artist" and they got up from their crib and drew a picture of whatever, and I was never able to do that Everything I did came hard, it was never easy, and it took time, and it took study, and it took thinking about it and worrying about it, and it came to me as a craft. Now I know some people who, it seems to me, that the stuff that they do is, as a result of some kind of "plunking" of God, or whatever magic thing that happens, and they seem to be able to do these magic things with their hands, and they don't seem to think a whole lot about it. As a matter of fact, some people seem very brainless about the things that they do, and I just don't understand that, and I don't think of myself as that type of person.

WB: Because the comic book is such a visual medium, one would think that anyone capable of drawing pictures in a series would be capable of telling a story. Yet we hear professionals talking about artists who draw well but "aren't good storytellers." How is that possible?

ADAMS: Well, there are priorities in your mind, as an artist. If your priorities to tell a story, then you will give up other things in order to do that. You can't learn everything. **Learning** to tell a story is like **learning** to draw anatomy, or **learning** to draw perspective. If you **learn** to draw anatomy, you may become so enamoured of the anatomy that you don't put the anatomy to work with you in telling a story,even though that's your job. You're so involved in drawing the figure so perfectly that you make the pose the thing, and whether or not the pose fits whatever the character's supposed to be doing really doesn't matter because you just dig the pose so much. Apparently, comic book storytelling has to do with some kind of a balance. Now, different people think the balance is in different areas, and that's why different people work differently. I don't know exactly where Kirby's attitude is, for example, toward the balance, but it is, I would think, probably deeper into storytelling than mine is, since I admire Kirby so much for that storytelling aspect. His anatomy is atrocious, but, by the same token, his anatomy is right. He gets the **feeling** of figures in the positions they're in without actually drawing them there. He puts 'em in a position, and the position looks right, if it's a running pose, a jumping pose, it **looks** right; the guy would be like that. Another guy who may know anatomy perfectly might not get the pose right. Kirby has learned just enough about anatomy to tell the story well. Gil Kane, for example, approaches it from a different direction. He has concentrated on anatomy, and he has let go of those qualities that add dimension to things to a great degree, and, more often than not, he needs an inker who knows something about dimension and what is the shadow side and what is the light side, to add some dimension to his material; very often it's very flat.

WB: You think, then, that Gil Kane is dimensionless?

ADAMS: No. I don't necessarily think that, because he forces dimension into it, and his own inking style is so charming and so interesting to me personally that I forgive him everything. **(laughter).**

WB: You said something interesting

there—

ADAMS: I said about five interesting things there—

WB; Okay five interesting things, but I'm focusing on one particular thing—

ADAMS: Okay.

WB; You said he learned "just enough about anatomy to help him tell the story well." I don't think that's getting at the point of the question. There are other things to take into consideration, I could imagine, when telling a story than simply drawing pictures in a series, and what these are is what I wanted to get at—

ADAMS: Except that when I spoke about anatomy I spoke about one of those aspects that are very deeply involved in comic books today. We're doing superheroes today, we're not doing bedroom soap-operas. So that anatomy in storytelling is very important, but it's again, one aspect, and it's one aspect I personally choose to focus on. Another aspect may be his ability to keep a story moving towards something. Very often an artist will just draw pictures and assume he's telling a story rather than draw pictures in sequence or draw pictures that will move; will build. My attitude is that I like to get a feeling through a story that I do. If it's a short story, I like to have **one** climax, 'cause there's not enough room for more. But if I have a longer story, what I tend to do is build toward a climax, and then let it down, build toward a climax again and let it down, and then I build for the superclimax, and that's the end of the story, and I try to end on that note, maybe one extra page of explanation or something like that. But each guy has his own feeling for that type of thing. Now, I do it on a conscious level; I don't know how many other people do it on a conscious level. Steve Ditko, I think, is an instinctive storyteller. I don't even know if he knows **why** his stuff is so interesting; so easy to follow. It bounces along from panel to panel; your eye can't help but go, follow it right through the panels. You almost have to turn the page fast to get to the first panel on the next page to follow that figure going this way and that. Whether one guy is better at it than another guy is really not the point; whether a guy is able to compensate for whatever faults he has in one area with other things in another area that would make up for it is really the problem. There are some guys who have faults in just so many areas that you don't care about their work guys, who will draw even better than Ditko, but not have Ditko's flair for storytelling, and that stuff just won't count for anything.

WB: Naturally, being an artist, you deal with the question of storytelling in visual terms. How much of the storytelling in comics is done by the writer, in the script, and how much by the artist?

ADAMS: I don't think it's a matter of percentage as much as it is a matter of quality consideration, I think that a good artist can make a bad script good (but he can't make it **read** good), he can make it **look** good and he can make it **seem** good. For example, Joe Kubert can make almost anybody's script look great, and he's had some terrible scripts to deal with. Some artists can take the best scripts in the world and turn them into a crock of crap. And they very often do. If you're going to make any kind of a value judgment, I would say 50-50. I would feel that the script is equally as important as the artwork, but without the art it wouldn't be a comic book story, therefore the artwork is equally as important as the script.

WB: It's been said and widly accepted that the comic book is dependent upon visuals in the sense that without them, the form you're working in is no longer the comic book. To what degree is this true?

ADAMS: Well, it's true almost exclusively. The thing that you leave out when you do a comic book story is you leave out all the descriptive passages that show a writer's style. Very rarely are you able to tell a writer's style by the dialogue that he uses. When you reach a certain level - a certain quality - of writer, they will write the same character the same way, because they understand him very often the same way; the only way you can tell the difference is the leaning on a particular type of character. You say, well, a particular writer likes to write tough guys, so he puts a lot of tough guys in. The other way, the way that you normally tell a writer's style from another writer's style is the way he **describes** things, the way he leads you into a story, the way he takes you out of a scene or puts you into another scene, and that's almost exclusively out of character in comic books, You just don't do it, All that's handled by the artist. I don't feel that I'm putting a writer down if I don't recognize his particular story in a comic book, because the stuff that I would recognize it by isn't present: the descriptive material, and all that's present is dialogue, so if I mistake a Denny O'Neil story for a Mike Friedrich story if I'm only reading five or six pages, I can't blame myself, because it's very conceivable that Mike's copy and Denny's copy, within a certain limited range, would read the same. I think that with maybe a 22-page book, you'd be able to tell the difference, but it would take something like that to be able to tell.

WB: Can you conceive of a totally new physical presentation of a story, one that would still allow the story to be readily identifiable to the general public as a comic book per se?

ADAMS: Not a **completely** new way to do things. I think that within the framework there's so much variety that to go outside of the framework would mean a whole different type of item, and I can't conceive of what it would be. I've never found anything that was quite as satisfying as words and pictures going together, whether they're in a moving picture format—movies or television—or in a comic book format, where the picture is still. It seems to me that going outside of that format would mean that you'd have to go into moving pictures, or just no copy, or no pictures. And there already are art forms that deal in those areas.

WB: Define then, the expression "comic book".

ADAMS: I don't think there's a translation of "comic book". I think that the best description would be "comic format", and "comic format" would mean telling a story with words and pictures in a continuity. the origin of comic books, or the comic format, is found on cave walls, (A point made by Stephen Becker in **Comic Art in America.** -Ed.) where the caveman tried, in his limited way without a language, to describe what happened that afternoon; how come they got Buffalo meat on the dinner table instead of pig meat, because they went out and they killed this Buffalo; and they did it in this **series of pictures.** As far as I'm concerned, (it's) probably the first and the most original art form that has ever existed outside of man maybe banging on a hollow log.

WB: Well, I can pick up a copy of the old Saturday Evening Post, or even any children's book or magazine, for that matter, and show you a story told in words and pictures, but it's not a comic book.

ADAMS: If the story was completely told by that series of pictures and words I would call it a comic book. I would call it a comic format. It could be done in photographs—Harvey Kurtzman has done it with photographs before. If a thing is done so that the words and pictures do the whole job of telling the story, not just give little excerpts; not just pull little incidents out of it; but tell the whole story, then it's comics format, and validly part of a comic book, and validly part of any potential comic book that somebody might come up with.

WB: What is the greater value of doing something in panels as opposed to spot illos in text fiction?

ADAMS: No, there's nothing to oppose it. You either do it in a sequence of pictures with words or you're into another field, you're into illustration. You do **an illustration.** For example, if you do a book and there's an illustration every ten pages, well, you can't very well say that it's an illustrated story. Somebody has taken an incident out and illustrated it. It really has no validity as far as helping you read the story; it's not even within the context of the story. You may read it on one page, and not until the next page do you see the illustration. It's a whole different thing. The bigger field, to me, is the comic format field. And there are a lot of things that fit within that area. There are very few things that fit within the area of **illustration,** or painting, or whatever you want to call it. That is a very limited field. It seems to me that painting or illustration or whatever you want to call it, is an offshoot. It's really taking one element of the comics format, or one element of what those guys did in the caves, and isolating it. The other is writing. Taking the other element, the communication by symbols, and turning them into writing, is taking another element out of that double format and turning it into an isolated thing. So you have paintings on the one hand and you have written stories on the other hand. It seems to me that the ideal thing is to put 'em together and make a picture thing. Which we have done in the last half-century, and made motion pictures and television of the extension. Comic books are closer to what it originally was; comic book format material.

WB: The comic book cannot do without visuals, but can it do without text? Can you conceive of a story totally without narrative or dialogue still being able to make the kind of statements, for example, that you and Denny O'Neil make in the GREEN LANTERN series?

ADAMS: Yes.

WB: Yes. Okay, how?

ADAMS: Yes. Just do it. It's not really that difficult. If a person doesn't speak and experiences something, it's a story. When he doesn't speak, there are no words, and if you can describe everything through the action, then you don't need words to describe it. The **essence** is not the words you use to tell the story, it's the story you tell. Words are merely a tool to help you tell the story. You can either do without that particular tool, or do **with** the particular tool. The object is to tell the story. Words and pictures are not really that imperative. Something that you can look at and understand is important. A circle—an animated circle within a square—can tell a story, but you can do it in a seequence, or you do it motion. If there's a story to tell, and it doesn't need anything but the story to tell. And that's what we do, we tell stories.

WB: I think perhaps the greater context of that question will be a little more evident as we carry this a bit further. What I have here is a copy of a fanzine called Mysterian. **This is the first issue. In the Adalia story, the captions could very easily be isolated from the story. You could collect all those captions, type them up and run them in a magazine by themselves and tell a story with one or two pictures from these panels run to illustrate, as you put it, excerpts of the story. What's the value of this type of approach, where the pictures and their captions can exist independently of each other, rather than work together?**

ADAMS: I would say that there is very little value in something like the thing that you've shown me, because you've done the job twice. If the artwork has done the job, then you don't need all the words. If the word has done the job, then you don't need the pictures. What you're saying is that you have such a stupid audience that they can't visualize what the words are telling them. Or, you're saying that you have such an illiterate audience that they don't have the patience to read a whole page at once, they'd rather read 22 words or so, then look at a picture. Now, I'm not saying that this shouldn't be done that way because there are a lot of people who don't like to read, and there are a lot of people who like to look at pictures. I happen to be one who likes to look at pictures myself. I would feel by the end of this particular story as if you were wasting a portion of my time by making me read all these words and doing the same thing in pictures. It would seem to me that you could have used up the time and effort a great deal more usefully. The words really should say a little bit more; maybe what is behind these characters. You described this to me earlier as something that was meant for a twelve-year-old mind and I agree. It seems to me that there are deeper thoughts that you could have—

WB: Perhaps I should have said looked like it was meant for a twelve-year-old mind.

ADAMS: If you want to change it, that's okay. But I read this as something that is wasting my time. I would rather know the motivating factors behind what's going on in the pictures, You'll also find in here that you have put in copy that would normally be in balloons: "She's escaping me for now, but only for now." All you've done in those cases is removed it from the balloons and put it in the caption and I can't really see a whole lot of value to that except that the person wouldn't have to put the lettering in the picture and interrupt the space. And it's another way of doing it. It just seems to me to be quite the—

WB: It's a condescending approach—

ADAMS: Who?

WB: I say, this approach appears to be somewhat condescending to the audience to which it is aimed—

ADAMS: Yeah, that's a valid criticism of it. It just seems to me—no, I don't know about "condescending." I think it's an amatuerish approach, and I think something of value can come of it, but I don't think it's very valuable at this point. I don't think it tells a good story. But I think it's a good effort. Any effort in any direction that's a little bit different will sooner or later result in something that will be worthwhile. I would say to anybody who was doing that to continue doing it, because sooner or later, again, something will come out of it that will be valuable. If you keep on doing what everybody else is doing you're just wasting your time anyway because somebody's already doing it.

WB: You wouldn't work that way?

ADAMS: I don't know. I might be able to find something in that type of approach that I would be happy doing. I can see myself going, for example, into the unconscious of a character and doing something that is not quite explained in the pictures, doing **that** in the caption, to **add** to what's going on in the picture. I would be a lot happier with that; a lot more satisfied as a storyteller. I don't like to tell the story twice; it just bothers me.

WB: In an interview FANTAZINE **conducted with Denny O'Neil last October, he said that the comic book is "restricted by visuals", especially with regard to depicting intense emotional turmoil, and he cited the "To be or not to be" soliloquy from** Hamlet **as an example. Depicting this is different, if not impossible. To what extent do you find this true?**

ADAMS: I think that ultimately it is impossible, but I think ultimately it is impossible under any other conditions. For example, you'll always find an actor who will do the soliloquy better, and if you have the experience of one actor doing it better, then the expressions that flow across the face of a lesser actor are still dissatisfying. Again, with comic book material, if you have a better artist, a person who can interpret the expressions on a face with that much more ability, then he's gonna put more into it. So, it's a matter of degrees: you start getting better in certain areas in degrees. You can **never** become a live performer, but then again, a live performer is not necessarily a great actor, a great actor is not necessarily the greatest actor, and the greatest actor is not necessarily Hamlet. So it's a matter of degrees. There are limitations in comic books just the same as there are limitations in the theatre; there are limitations in every art form. There are fewer limitations in comics than people imagine; there are greater areas that comics can go into than people imagine. Let me give you an example . . . .There's a face that I did in the first **Green Lantern** that I did, of a black man. No matter what kind of movie you go to, what kind of theatre you go to, you can never turn back the page and look at that face again. Once it's over, it's gone. The guy has made that expression. If you got any feeling out of that black man's face, you can finish the book, go back to that face and look at it, and sometime, when you're thinking about it, you can pick up the comic book again, and open to that page and look at it, and get an impact from it. That's something that can't be done in movies; something that can't be done on stage; just **a minor** indication of the kind of things you can do in comics.

WB: You've exploited that ability—to "get impact" from a comic book—to its full potential in your use of close-ups of horrified faces, or surprising close-ups of horrifying faces. I think of the close-ups of the Man-Bat and of the Man-Bat's bride; Oliver Queen's face in Green Lantern **85 when the arrow from the crossbow has just pierced his shoulder . . .Is there a trick to laying out a story, conceiving of it as a whole, to bring about that shock effect? Must you conceive of the story as a whole to do it?**

ADAMS: I don't know if you **must**, I know that I **do**. I know that I tend to read a story over twice and get a "feel" of the story, and try to understand what I'm driving at in the story. If you pick up any of the stuff that I've done, although a lot of the art may look like it's done by the same guy, each story has a different **feeling.** You have a different **feeling** when you put down the book. From the **Batman** book to a **Green Lantern** book, there's a different feeling there. A lot of the faces may be the same, even through the **Green Lantern** book, (but) you have feeling of, like, when they go into this coal-mining town, you have a feeling of the town, and it's planned, it's a conscious effort on my part to give you that feeling, even in the panels that don't have any backgrounds, you just follow them, they go into the forrest with the Indians, you get a different feeling from that book. You can remember the book not so much by the pictures, but by the feeling. If I talk about the Indian book **(Green Lantern 79: "Ulysses Star is Still Alive"- EDITORS.)**, you have a feeling in your head, it was kind of cool and green, and it was about these Indians that had a little darker faces, and some old ladies, and you just have a feeling. I don't necessarily belive that I do faces just so much for schock value, but for emotional impact. And sometimes the emotion can be very subtle, and I'll try my best to do a subtle face. In the last panel of the next **Green Lantern,** which is the second drug book, there's situation going on that I thought originally was very hard to interpert, and, as it turns out, I was correct. Where—

WB: Is this the withdrawal sequence?

ADAMS: No, this has to do with the character Speedy who just completed withdrawal and he faces his guardian

(Green Arrow) with ambivalent feelings. He is mad at him for not helping him, he is enraged at society for not helping the drug problem, and always attacking the symptons. He feels that he has a purpose now in helping some of his friends, but he's not too happy because he knows that his friends are going to die, even though he's trying to help them, and he doesn't think enough of his guardian. Although he appreciates his guardian for what his guardian has done all these years to help him, he doesn't want to stay with him . . .And the way we have him go away and the look of Green Arrow's face where you have a mixture of he's just been put down (the kid, as a matter of fact, even punched him in the mouth) . . .he's been put down, and the kid told him that he's just like everbody else in society. But he also has this feeling of pride toward this kid who has just grown up in a couple of minutes, and is walking away from him. So he has one of these smiling expressions with the tears coming down the eyes, that he can't hold back, but he's got one of these really proud expressions, and we describe the lump in his throat, and I've had three people start to cry looking at that panel so far. I don't know how many are going to cry when they see the thing in the book, but just in the original form, three people have cried. Now, it's a very subtle expression, and very hard to get and it was gotten, I guess, because it was so clear in my mind I was able to put it down, and the the thing worked out that way. But that another example of not necessarily using it to shock you, but there was some kind of emotion that I want to turn on, and in spite of the fact that people think they have control of themselves, when you're reading a comic book, or involved in a piece of art, I can control you like I'm pressing buttons, and you will do exactly as I say, and there's nothing you can do about it except put down the comic book, and walk away from it, and that option is always there. But if I know what I'm doing, and I do often enough to make me at least partially successful, I can do that to you. I can make you feel unhappy or get mad at somebody or cry almost, almost to that point.

WB: After O'Neil cited the Hamlet soliloquy example in that interview, FANTAZINE **suggested that such a conflict could be effected in terms of montage-techniques. John Benson has cited, in** ALTER EGO **10's interview with Gil Kane, Russian filmmaker Nikolai Pudovkin's technique of taking an expressionless face and gfving it expression by superimposing scenes of suffering and tcitue, for example. Benson seems to think this can be done effectively in comic books—**

ADAMS: Well, I don't know about that particular technique, but I would be willing to bet that I could get more out of a scene than a bad actor could. I don't know if I could get more out of it than a **good** actor, but if I were given that particular soliloquy, and I did it for two pages and I balanced the page, I think I could get quite a bit out of it, if I set it up right. I'd have to set it up right, but it could be done. I do things for advertising agencies, things that are called storyboards, which are layoiuts for thirty-second and one minute commercials, in which I have to take just a face and run it through a series of expression changes, because this particular commercial might just have to do with a guy holding up a toothbrush or something, and they lately (it's not lately any more, it's been going on for years), they don't use pretty models any more, they use what they call "ugly models" and people who have those kinds of expressive faces that move around and do things. I've been able to do storyboards where I've done 50 frames of just one face and I've moved his expression all over the place, so that it's never the same in two panels. So I've had a lot of experience with this stuff.

WB: Even though the comic is a visal medium, because the pictures are static, **it can't do without writing. This is why it is so difficult for me to conceive of comics making effective statments without writing—**

ADAMS: Except there **are** some panels that **aren't** without movement. When you see a fight scene, or an animated action scene, you don't miss comic, because you're following that figure across the panel. Now that's a limited form of action within the panel—

WB: Because it doesn't move **in the sense that a** movie **"moves" . . .**

ADAMS: That's right, but it **does** "move", in other words, you will follow it with your eye. There's another thing; there's another type of movement that you don't notice, that you're not aware of, but if you place balloons and figures in angles in backgrounds in the right positions, you can take he reader through a page and into a next page, and have his eye constantly moving over that page, and it's an action that **he** is doing. He doesn't understand it; he doesn't understand why, for example, a page flows so freely, or why there are times when I can do a sixteen-page story and it will be like reading three pages; you just go through it so fast, when you get it to the end you say, "Wait!" You know, "I know there was a story there, I remember all the stuff," but I've taken you and I've just zipped you right through the thing, you know and you're like helpless, you're just blown along with it, and you'll see figures bouncing around and doing this and running upstairs and swinging and then falling and doing that—

WB: I think the reader is **aware of it; not so much when it's happening as when it's NOT happening.**

ADAMS: Yeah, maybe. And you can **stop** something, you can stop it by just having figures stannd there and talk to one another. You have to do it carefully, so people don't get bored, but you want them to **read.** You've done all this zippy, entertaining stuff, so that they want to rest. They stop and they rest. In the middle of that **Green Lantern** story (**GL** 85: "Snowbirds Can't Fly" -Ed.), I wanted people to read the copy that went on when Green Lantern and Green arrow went into that apartment with the two boys. Now, you read that because your eye had been zipping around quite a bit before that, and now **you're** in this apartment, there's not a lot of bright colors, and everybody's just kind of standing there. You notice the two rhinoceroses sitting there, a little bit of entertainment, you know, you get thrown off for a minute, then you continue reading the copy, and then things start flying all over the place again. Now I stopped you and I've made you read that copy, in spite of the fact that if there were too many pages to that, you wouldn't've read it, you'd have stopped and said, "I don't wanna read all this crap." and you go on to the zip-zip stuff, but you've read it, there's nothing you can do about it.

WB: But the two rhinoceroses wouldn't have made any sense unless you read **the copy about the weapons the chinese boy's father collected . . .**

ADAMS: You can read an into those rhinoceroses, but those rhinoceroses were a very "in" gag, and I'm always ashamed to do an "in" gag, but it was just too much fun to resist. Denny wrote a panel in which he said, "In this panel, I want to see Green Lantern talking to the Oriental boy and the black boy, and Green Arrow is standing off to the side with Speedy," and he says, "and while you're at it, throw in a couple of rhinoceroses." So I did!

DICK GIORDANO (breaking in): Denny does things like that . . .

WB: Isn't it really not the illustrator who's giving dimension to the story, but very often the writer who's giving further dimension to the art? A good argument for this is "A Vow from the Grave" in Detective **No. 410, particularly in that one panel in which Batman is shown tackling Kano Wiggins, and the caption reads "— and within a minute, the big man sighs, collapsing like a punctured ballon . . ." (page 4, panel 3)**

ADAMS: I'll tell you something about that; I found it very interesting in that I got a lot of reaction on that particular thing. I needed on that particular page a lot of room, because on the pages preceeding it I didn't want to have much going on; the pages following it there were more and more panels, 6 panels a page and 5 panels a page. I decided at that point that since Denny had written such a good piece of copy that I would be able to do a panel that really wouldn't have much in it, merely an action, just like something like that (indicates object falling over), just something like a matchstick falling, and that the copy was so powerful that I didn't need to do one of these—like I could have taken a page and done one of these Gil Kane things where everything goes **CRAASH!** and you get those splashes of water and stuff, but it would've taken away from that copy that was so good, so if you look at the rest of the page where the copy wasn't as powerful, the pictures were more than powerful. He jumps on his back; you see the panel just before that?; he's on his back, he's wrapped around the guy's neck, no copy in there that really mattered. And then, when they fall, it's just copy that tells the story. Now, I did that because I needed the space, and I did it because I didn't want to overcome that copy because the copy was so good. So what it did was he gave me a breathing space by writing a beautiful piece of copy. Now, any other writer—a lot of other writers—would have written copy so badly. If, for example it were B H , B H **wouldn't** have given me a good piece of copy there, and I would've had to swipe space from another panel, and the other panels would've been lousy, But I was able to take that much room because Denny wrote a good piece of copy, and I'm thankful to him for it. And he does that enough times so that I don't have to overcompensate for the writer's difficulty.

WB: He's probably the only writer aware of the need, sometimes, for imagery **to** augment—

ADAMS: Well, you see, the reason that we do have descriptive phrases in comic books despite the fact that we have ballons and we have pictures is to add an

element that you can't put in. Now, it may just be possible that if I had 100 pages to do every story, that I could put in all the things that Denny talks about; I could do a guy "toppling like an oak" across a double-page spread in a series of animated pictures. But I just don't have the time, and nobody's gonna give me all those pages, and I'm not gonna do 'em! So the things that Denny does, and the things that a good writer does, is compensate for those areas that you just can't do—

WB: "Visual shorthand", as Denny put it—

ADAMS: Yeah, okay, good phrase.

WB: Do you find Marvel's system—I saw one X-Men you and Denny did together—do you find the system where you draw the panels from a plot, with the captions and dialogue added later, more conducing to producing the effect of copy enhancing illustration?

ADAMS: No, but what I do find is that, again, with an individual who knows how to write very well, that I can do a small panel, for example, and write a little note that says, "You gotta write good copy for this panel or else I'm dead" and he'll write it. Now the guy I'm talking about is Roy Thomas. Roy Thomas has never failed to come through for me when it comes to something like that. When I have needed something in the writing, he's not only been aware of it by my notes, but by his own artistic ability, and he's been able to put it in. I've had occasion to work with Stan Lee, for example, and although Stan does an interesting and competent job, he doesn't put in those little things that I think a story needs to boost it up to where it should be. There were two **Thor** books that were mildly interesting books, but there were opportunities for subtlety that you'll never know that were in there, I had a whole—did you read those **Thor** books?

WB: That was one case where I took one look at a book and said "Forget it"; I thought, and I still think, that anyone who came up with the brilliant idea of putting Joe Sinnott on your pencils should've been drawn and quartered!

ADAMS: Yeah? Well, I did a thing in there where Volstag had been taken—all of Thor's friends were in Hades or in whatsisname's world, and Volstag was zapped by—remember the name of the character that wasn't—what was the name of the devil character? Mephisto!—Mephisto zaps Volstag right at the beginning, and then he does this puppet thing with the other characters, and finally after he's been defeated, he brings Volstag back. Now I put an expression on Volstag's face before, with the full intent that was to happen was that something happened to him when he had disappeared, that Mephisto sent him someplace which during the span of time that he disappeared and reappeared, something really important happened in his life, with his eternal life, so that when he came back he was a changed person. So that at some future point, they would be able to do a story in which Volstag experienced this. Well, Stan just wrote over it, as if it didn't exist! He just wrote, "I'm back again and I'll kill anybody that stands in my way!" Just fantastic! Just—He did a thing at the end of the story in which, first of all, six or seven pages before the story was over, Odin sitting on his regal throne and says, "Don't worry, Thor will take care of everything, solve the whole problem." Which ended the story **right there**, as far as the reader was concerned, because he knew that by the time he finished that book, Thor would've taken care of everything. So forgetting that he did that, you know, I figured, well, he hasn't given away the way he's gonna take care of it, right? So I had this whole battle between Loki and Thor, who were in each others' bodies, and the thing that Thor has to do is to get Loki, who is in his body, to throw the hammer at him, and to lose the hammer, to switch back to Don Blake, and then the bodies would switch, okay? Now I had it set up so that you **wouldn't know** what he was doing; he's attacking Thor, or Loki in his body, constantly, to make him throw that hammer, and then, at the last monent, he throws it and all of a sudden, there's this change, y'know, and he's had this planned all along. The **first time** they're confronting each other, Stan writes in a ballon that says, "I've got to make him throw that hammer!" And that's like four pages before the end of the story! Well, everybody—he gets him to throw the hammer, right?, the hammer imbeds itself in the wall, and that's it! He wins the fight! He gave away the whole ending of the story; I might as well have not drawn the last seven pages!

WB: If I were a professional writer, I couldn't conceive of working in that framework, because I would think a comics story should be conceived of as a whole, and I can see where that system allows for that.

ADAMS: Well, it is conceived of as a whole. I conceive of it as a whole, and I give them an indication of what it's to be. If you—you ought to take the time out to read those **X-Men** stories; we did things in those **X-Men** stories that you wouldn't believe. We set clues for things, solutions of plots, that came six issues later. The plots were tight as hell, the ones we're doing now in the **Avengers**, the plots are really tight. And we're doing these long-range stories. Roy's and my mind may not work exactly the same, but we're sympathetic up to a certain degree, about how a story should be put together.

WB: Would you prefer to write your own scripts?

ADAMS: In the best of all possible worlds, I would prefer to do everything myself.

WB: You would prefer to edit, write, pencil, ink—?

ADAMS: Yeah. Everything. If I could get a thousand dollars a page, you know, that would be fine, I would be glad to do that. Well, the way it is, it's worked out very well. for example, at National I get Denny O'Neil, at Marvel I get Roy Thomas. You can't ask for better writers. At National I get Dick Giordano to ink, at Marvel I get Tom Palmer, and you can't ask for better inkers. And that's pretty close to being perfect.

WB: And you color your own stuff—

ADAMS: And I get to color my own stuff.

WB: I've read that you prefer to color your own stuff because you don't want "to lose the storytelling". What has coloring to do with storytelling?

ADAMS: I don't see a panel in black and white, I see it in color. It's going to appear in color, I don't like the idea of somebody else's mind telling me how my story's gonna go. If I think it's nighttime, or I think something is in shadow, that's the way it should be. Now, people may disagree with me, but I don't give a crap whether they disagree with me or not. If they want to use me, they want me to do their stuff, and I feel that part of my job is to do that, they can either take it or leave it, I don't make any bones about it if that's the way I happen to like to do it. Now, I've had to fight for that, many times, and as a matter of fact, I'm still fighting to some degree over at Marvel. I don't really understand their attitude; there seems to be a certain amount of hostility toward me coloring my own stuff, but it really doesn't mean a whole lot to me.

WB: You mentioned "doing everything". How do you feel about the results of people doing everything, like Jack Kirby or Mike Sekowsky?

ADAMS: I don't know that Mike Sekowsky's ever done everything. He **edited** his own stuff, and wrote it. . .

WB: Well, he didn't ink it and he didn't color it.

ADAMS: Yeah, he didn't ink it he didn't color it. He's had trouble on deadlines, I think some of the work might have shown that; I liked a lot of what he did; I approved of a lot of what he did. I felt that after the fourth or fifth issue the coloring went down and hurt his work quite a bit.. Up to that point, the coloring had been done by Jack Adler, with a little assist from myself. And Mike. . .well, it was allowed that other people would color it and it really didn't come out quite as good, and certain areas—I think it's up to the individual. When you're talking about being in a position to control everything that you do, certain people do it well, and certain people don't. Certain people do it well under certain regimes, and certain people don't. I think Mike Sekowsky should have been given a greater opportunity to do what he thinks was right under different conditions. I don't think the conditions were conducive to him doing the things that he wanted to do. I think that which you would really do a good job, and the fact is that he **did** do a good job, for several issues. Even the late books I found quite entertaining to one degree or another, not as entertaining as the earlier ones, but again, he was editing and writing the earlier ones, too, except for the Denny O'Neil issues, naturally.

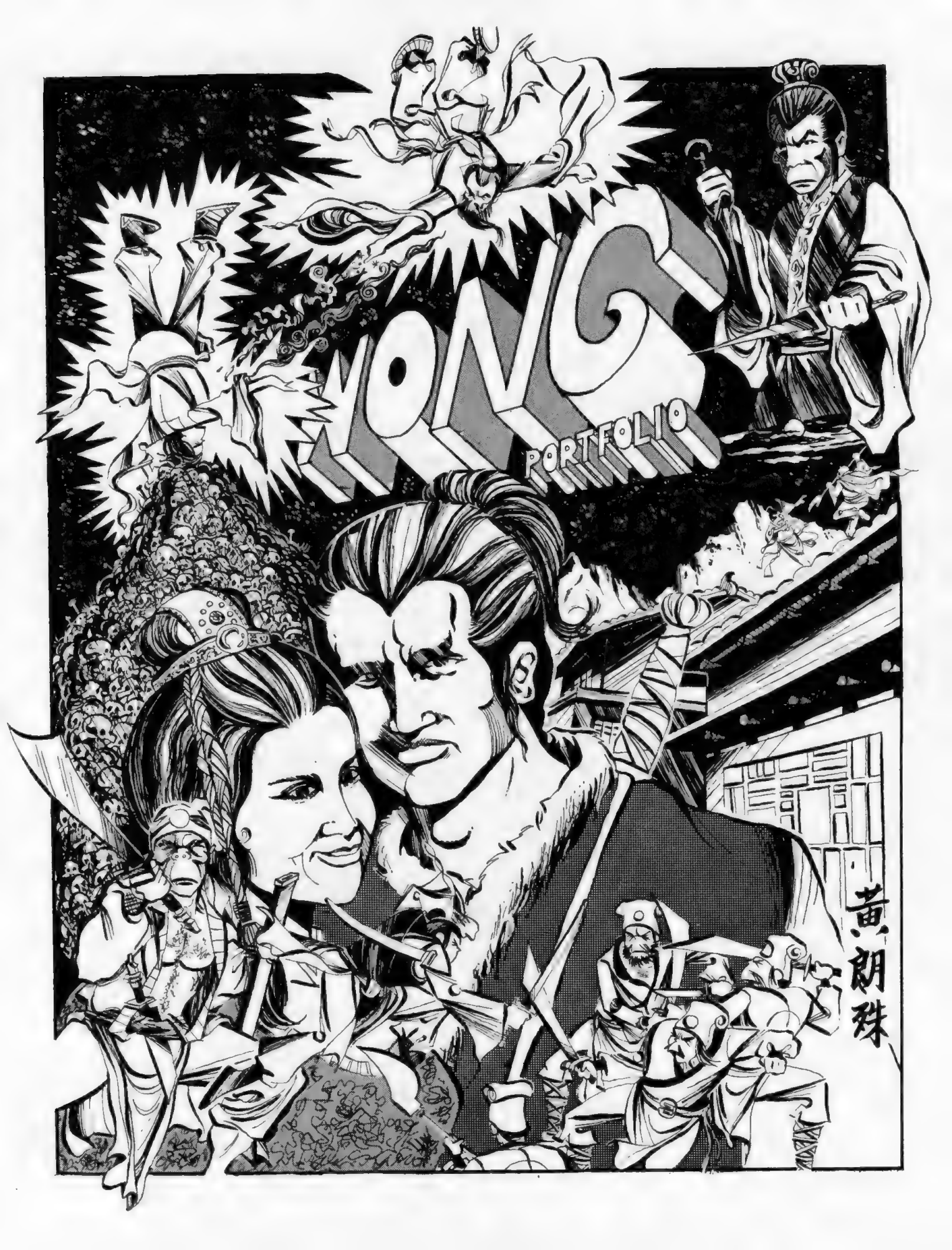
WB: In an interview FANTAZINE conducted with Dick Giordano, he started that often someone involved in total creation can't see small, obvious errors in continuity, structure, etc., because he's so caught up in that creation. He cited the incident with the next Man-Bat, story, where Man-Bat is supposed to pick up someone with his hands while in flight, but that's impossible because his hands are attached to his wings. Do you foresee a likelihood of something like that happening often to you if you "did everything" ? What happens when there's no editor with a distance on your material?

ADAMS: I'd be less likely to get involved in that problem, but the fact is, that the guy who saw the **Man-Bat** swooping down and picking somebody with his arms actually did finish the job that way. And within his style it really didn't look that bad. So, I must only assume, for example, my rendition of it is so realistic that I couldn't conceive of it happening that way. Another person would conceive of it happening that way. I would naturally not make what I would call that kind of mistake when I wrote the story, if I wrote the story, because I would immediately see that it was wrong. But within his style and his framework, the writer didn't find it wrong, and when he drew the story, he didn't find it that wrong. So, everybody has their own individual way of doing things. My attitude with writers generally is that if we can agree 80 per cent of the time, that's a pretty good average, and if the writer is good enough to satisfy me 80 per cent of the time then I want him working with me. Nobody can be a 100 per cent.

DONALD WONG
portfolio

DONALD WONG, *born March 23, 1955, started drawing by sketching comic characters such as Flash Gordon, Superman and Spiderman. Becoming bored with drawing the comics top-sellers, he turned to humor/cartoons, which he has had great success with. His humor work has appeared in* The Collector, The Wonderful World of Comix *and* Fantastic Fanzine, *and professionally, he has sold to* Golf Magazine, Ski Magazine *and* The Medical Tribune.

Recently, his work has changed drastically from straight humor to semi-serious or serious fine-line pen & ink illustrations depicting the world of violent samauri's rescuing damsels in distress and combatting forces of the supernatural. His work has changed from light humor to exceptionally fine illustration. His style, unique in its pleasing simplicity, his diversity of pen lines and unusual and pleasant manner of portraying violent scenes, leads us to believe he's a very special talent, one we're proud to present here in WORD BALLOONS. *We hope you agree.*


WONG
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transcription:
WRITERS OF THE COMICS
metro con 71
denny o'neil · ted white · len wein

Transcribed and Prepared for Publication by Gary Groth

Panel: The Writers of Comics took place at the 1971 Metro Con, Sunday, August 15. Panel members were Mark Hanerfeld, Marvin Wolfman, Denny O'Neil, Ted White, Len Wein, and Gerry Conway. It proved to be the most interesting panel at the convention, one of the most interesting panels at any convention; we present the complete transcript here:

O'NEIL: We have one of our panel members that's graciously volunteered to insult us all, and to say what is wrong with comic book writing, so maybe we'll let him make his statement and then the rest of the panel members will respond to it. To introduce our illustrious panel members, on the end, Mark Hanerfeld, an assistant editor at National; fabulous Marv Wolfman; Len Wein, and to my left, Ted White and Gerry Conway.

WHITE: The comic book story I first want to discuss is one in which Harlan Ellison is used as a character, and the author of the story is Mike Friedrich who intrudes himself periodically with stuff like this: Quote, "Like pounding cold California seawaves splashing over an indefensible swimmer, the man and story about to unfold are pressuring me to tell this tale..." That's awfully bad writing any way you look at it, and he doesn't know what the word "indefensible" means. He goes on to say, "You're waiting on Sunset Boulevard, Los Angeles -- thinking of its wind from nature's soothing sea-surf, through the heart of man's glaring tinseltown, USA: Hollywood..." Obviously, Mike Friedrich's never been in Hollywood. It's not at all close to the sea-surf. It's miles and miles and miles away from it. But he presumes to tell us, that, "This is 'The Strip!' This is where the action is, where we find *you* tonight..." And it's sort of a second-person story where "you" is Harlan Ellison.

O'NEIL: Harlequin Ellis.

WHITE: Harlequin Ellis, yes. My contention is that, with a few exceptions, some of the authors of which will be found on this panel, comic book writing is terrible. It's terrible, not simply for the gross examples I quoted. It's terrible for the things that these people have done, which is implicit in what Mike Friedrich has carried to a new level of absurdity. Let me quote you, before I go on, from the latest issue of the Justice League -- "The JLA Mailroom" is a gem. Now, I should point out when I read this comic I'd known Harlan Ellison for 20 years. and I was profoundly embarrassed for him. There are things in here about how he is the most eligible bachelor in Hollywood, and all about his previous love lives and how his marriages have failed, which, whatever else you wanted me to say about the story is just glib crap. Since I was around at the time of those marriages and saw what was really involved, I personally was offended by this story of Mike Friedrich's. I wrote a letter to Julius Schwartz, the first letter I've written him in years, and just so he would notice it, I wrote it on my professional letterhead, and I got back a personal letter from him in which, he essentially said in a paragraph and a half, "Well, Harlan liked it." And that's about all he said.

Well, now, the reaction from the readers is appearing in THE JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA. There is one, two, three, four, five, six letters. Only one of them is critical, and it's critical on a really asinine level. Now I know that I wrote them an intelligent letter of criticism, in which I pointed out the way in which the words were misused. I mean, writers should know how to use the words they're using if they're going to use them right. He didn't print it. I know a lot of other people who were profoundly disturbed by that story and what it implied, and some of them wrote him letters. He didn't print them, either. Instead he ran letters saying things like, "Being an avid fan of Harlan Ellison, I would like to know his reaction and comments," which, of course, immediately gives him a chance to say, "On reading the manuscript, Harlan Ellison long-distanced us from California to glowingly inform us of his positive-plus reaction to his story." Blah, blah, blah. But they've got letters in here -- I'm not going to look through here for quotes -- but essentially they think this is probably the best piece of writing they've ever seen in comics. Now if five of these people think that something this bad, and it really is this bad, is good, there's a simple explanation: This is one story that stood out from the other stories. It was different. Primarily it was different because it was overwritten, it was purple, it was inept. But it wasn't bland, and most of the stories National publishes, with some exceptions, which Denny will tell us all about, are bland. They are ground out by machines in effect, or, just as bad, people who have decided to make themselves into machines, to repeat a long series of cliches', which they've learned because some other people had promoted these cliches' before them, and what they ended up with were stories which were indistinquishable one from another, except for occasionally when the plot had an interesting turn to it. So along comes Mike Friedrich who writes this really terrible story, but he does so with a certain amount of what I guess we can call flash.

O'NEAL: If we wanted to make a bad pun.

WHITE: Yeah. And it really stands out. In my mind, it stands out like a sore thumb, but it's less important -- it's sort of like, "I don't care what you say about me, spell my name correctly." At this point, the readers of this comic book would be happy with anything that doesn't resemble the last eighty-some issues. They should really just be awfully happy to see anything at all that's different, and it was different. And some of them say, in the letters column of the latest issue, that its difference alone made it the best story they've ever printed. Well, I really think this says more about the readers of THE JUSTICE LEAGUE OF

AMERICA than it does about Mike Friedrich, who I don't know, don't know anything about, but who strikes me purely on the basis of his writing that story, as an A-Number-1 Ass. But, what are we to make of people who are so conditioned by cliches', that even really terribly bad writing turns them on by the contrast it affords? Well, this doesn't have to be the case in comics. There have always been exceptions to it. It bothers me that so much comic writing is written by people who are capable of doing so much better, but who write down to this level, because, subconsciously, they think that's what is expected of them. Now, sitting to my right is Denny O'Neil, and Denny and I have sat around and gotten thoroughly squiffed with each other often enough that I think I can say this without insulting him. That Denny has the capacity to write ten times better than he's writing for anything, including GREEN LANTERN. And most of the time he's not doing it, probably because he is aware of the fact that it would be inappropriate to the medium to write as well as he really could write. And you read through a Denny O'Neil story and there are almost always, if he's got his heart in it at all, some flashes of something original in those stories, but his prose for the most part, undistinquished, except for when he -- now you *[Speaking to Denny]* said that the story in which you quoted Norman Mailer was not one of your favorites. And yet I thought your use of Norman Mailer in the end of that story was very effective, one of the few things that made it worthwhile.

O'NEIL: Just everything else that went before that was awful.

WHITE: Right. Alright, from his own mouth he stands condemned, you see. Now, when it's his turn to talk, he'll tell us why. Now, I've bought a story of Denny's that has appeared in FANTASTIC. And I've printed his book reviews, which are quite literate. And I've seen other stuff that he's written for other mediums, and I know exactly what he's capable of. And I've published stories by Gerry Conway and I know what he's capable of. And I don't see what these people are capable of in their comics work. Instead, what I see is primarily a collection of cliches' which have become standard comic bookees, slightly re-ordered story to story. And I don't think it's necessary. I don't think that this building on what other people have done twenty years before in the way of creating cliches' is the way comics got anywhere or where they're going to get anywhere. And I'm not really sure who the villain of the piece is. I don't really think there is a specific villain. I think it's a case of everybody saying that everybody else expects it. The readers seem to feel that this is what they're buying comics for, and this seems to be what the editors think that the readers are buying the comics for. And in the midst of all this we see the comics going out in a blaze that's not really glory. I've heard enough this weekend to convince me that if there are any comic books around to talk about a year from now it's going to be a minor miracle of the medium over the people who are running it. That this is probably the most ineptly run industry in the entire publications industry, which is in itself ineptly run. It's probably not a mistake that most people regard comics as the rock bottom of the publishing industry because it's just astonishing to me that an industry which is making fifty-million or more a year is geared for such incredible stupidity. It hires stupid people to run it; puts stupid people in charge of people who have some talent and some intelligence; and it assumes that every one of you is monumentally stupid. That you don't even know what simple, one-syllable words really mean, and if they misuse these words often enough, you'll assume that that's the right usage. This is the state of comic writing today, and it's miserable. And I don't really think there's any excuse for it. Denny?

O'NEIL: Let's have Mark respond first. Well, first of all. let me see if I understand what you're saying, to put it into a couple sentences that these people can respond to. You feel that the vast majority of comic writing is bad.

WHITE: Yes. With a few highspots here and there.

O'NEIL: Yeah. And you feel that the medium -- the people who are doing this bad writing are capable of much more, of much better writing.

WHITE: Some of them are. Some of the others have proven they are not. We won't name names.

O'NEIL: Okay, let's not. Mark, do you want to respond to that?

HANERFELD: It seems to me that you're making comic books completely different from any other kind of publishing venture by saying that comic books, if they're 90% crud, the rest of the publishing industry is not also 90% crud; it is. Ninety percent of everything -- it's Sturgeon's Law, and it's quite true. Reading AMAZING and FANTASTIC, it's mostly crud.

WHITE: I'll dispute you on that.

HANERFELD: The fact that you get a couple of good stories now and then is just that occasionally a writer will write a really great story. I know you try to get the best you can for your two publications, but it's not always the best because all the material that you're receiving is not the best. And what you're saying now is that comic books, which is a magazine to start with -- it's not like a book, which if you have a good property, you buy it and promote it. You have no deadlines. A magazine, any magazine being produced, has to meet a deadline. You do the best with what you've got, and you try to get the best people to write for you that you can, and if you don't have the best people, you get the next to the best people, and you turn out the best product that is possible under your situation, as I'm sure you do. And you end up with a couple of very good stories, a couple of very good writers, and the rest is all mulch. But it is no different than any other segment of the publishing industry.

O'NEIL: Marv?

WOLFMAN: I feel that, only in rare instances can you even try to get something through, assuming that the writer is capable of writing. Very rarely are you able to get something more than a rather simple story... Denny was talking the other day; that only when GREEN LANTERN was dying was he able to get that through; and only when BATMAN is doing badly are you able to change it, or whatever. I don't think that a writer wants to write pap, if possible, if they're capable of writing more. I'm sure everybody up here has written stories they absolutely despise. Deadlines; the time limit involved may be one day because they have to have a story done. And other problems involved in that. The writers are not really worse for what they're writing than, say, in science fiction or in mystery or any of the other hack literature that does come out. All of this is hack in a way--

O'NEIL: Pulp genre literature.

WOLFMAN: Okay. Sorry. Pulp fiction, whatever. It's all within a certain framework. The only thing is that comics, unfortunately, are limited to a 5 panel page or a 4 panel page, with 30 words of dialogue per each balloon, with a couple of days at most to write the script, and if you manage to get something through that's better than average it's really amazing.

O'NEIL: To say nothing of fantastic.

WOLFMAN: Yes, or Galaxy.

O'NEIL: Len?

WEIN: Part of what you said is true. Unfortunately, the people who are in charge of the creative people, aren't. They're inept, they're incompetent.

WHITE: That's what I said.

WEIN: Right. It is what you said, and it's true. That's part of the problem. There are those of us who would write better if we could get past the people who can stop us along the way. We have to conform to what they want, or they just won't publish it. We'll have no chance if we don't work within the framework they give us. In other words, if we just stand there and fight them and say, "No! It's wrong," and defy them, they'll find somebody else who'll do what they want. And, y'know, you try to work from the framework -- you have a fighting chance to get something accomplished, what little there is. It's, y'know, part of the problem of the game.

O'NEIL: What happened to Conway?

WHITE: He said he'd be back in a moment. I don't think he expected you to get to him this quickly. Why don't you speak?

O'NEIL: Well, I have nothing much to add to what's been said. I can speak to specific points of your rap, such as the cliche' accusation. I have in my notes here, that I was taking as you were talking, Rosy-Fingered-Dawn Cliche', meaning that Homer is full of those kind of things over and over again, and for much the same reason that comic books are full of them, and that's the deadline that Len was talking about. It is necessary for me to do between 35 and 50 scripts a year. They ain't all gonna be masterpieces. I have to have my little bag of stock phrases and stock tricks to get me through the periods when, y'know, it's just not there. As a writer, you know that there are times when there is no way that you can possibly do anything creative. But being a professional, and having commitments, there are times when, despite that condition, you have to put it down; therefore, we fall back on our bag. We dip into our cliche' bag.

You spoke about the language. I don't know about this. It's a thing that all of us up here have rapped about among our-

selves at one time or another. I know that it is possible for me to get away with an entirely different and entirely more purple kind of prose-writing when I'm working in comics than when I'm writing straight fiction or straight non-fiction. The language is eviserated by the picture. I think you may-- I am not going to defend this magazine *[JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA # 89]*. I think it's garbage. As Mark said, 90% of everything is crap. This falls solidly within that 90%. I think you may be reading comics as a whole, as the editor of AMAZING and FANTASTIC and forgetting the gestalt; forgetting how a picture can, to use a really five dollar word, ameliorate the language and make it into something else. because you take them as a whole, you don't take them seperately. As far as stupidity of plotting and so forth, I'd put the average comic book against the average episode of, say, The Mary Tyler Moore Show any time you want. We don't do worse than television. The difference is that those guys get about 4 grand a script and I get four hundred bucks. But take the mass media, the mass culture in this country as a whole and I don't think we stack up so badly at all. And it's a notorious cliche' that in television, almost always, if you get a really good show, a really good one, it'll last 39 episodes. The Outsider, East Side-West Side are the examples.

Okay. Conway's back, so let's let him respond.

CONWAY: I don't know if there's even any need to respond. Because I don't think anybody in their right mind would look at comic books today and say that they are actually literate. Maybe that ten percent that Mark said is good. *Maybe* that. More likely five percent, if that, has anything resembling quality, because basically it's a yards good media. Denny has said that more often than it deserves to be said. But it's true. What we're selling is not a 26 page story -- over at National, a 26 page story. We're selling you 26 pages *of* story. If that gets filled with garbage, it's filled with garbage. If it's filled with quality, it's filled with quality. It's like a tossing coin operation. But when it comes to actually what we aim to do, I don't even give us the credit for aiming for quality every time out. I know that, for example, and Len can substantiate this, Joe Orlando has a book of 1000 words commonly mispelled, and if your word is not in that thousand words...

WEIN: It's a 20,000 word book.

CONWAY: It's a 20,000 word book?

WEIN: Yeah. It's a book of 20,000 words of common usage.

CONWAY: But, yeah. They're words like dog and cat and things like this. And if it's not there, he just won't let you use it. At least that's the way it's been for quite a while. He might have changed that. And, with an attitude like that, I really doubt that you can ever really reach above a very limited amount of quality. I do agree with what Ted said about blandness over at National, though that's just purely a matter of taste. Meaning there are people who enjoy the National books more than Marvel because they're not constantly shouting at the top of their lungs. But, at the same time, I don't think they *ever* really shout at the top of their lungs, except in GREEN LANTERN, and that's a minor outrage, it's a minor feeling of outrage.

O'NEIL: It makes me feel pretty mad, too.

Panel members from left to right: MARK HANERFELD, MARV WOLFMAN, LEN WEIN.

CONWAY: I'm sure. No, I mean the book has a minor sense of outrage. Between the two companies, we put out 80 books a month, and then you've got Archie which puts out another ten, say, and then you've got Charlton which puts out maybe five or six...

O'NEIL: Oh, much more than that. Fifteen or sixteen.

CONWAY: The point is that there's over a hundred comic books published every month. And if five of them are worth reading that month I'll be pleased. And I think you can say the same thing about any other angle of the publishing industry. Look at the best seller list of the past couple of years. If there are two books that are really worth reading -- worth reading, it's a suprise.

O'NEIL: That was Mark's point. Ninety percent of everything is bad.

CONWAY: Yeah. So I don't see that comic books, which are generally put down because we take a very small target to shoot at -- y'know, we do it very well within that framework.

O'NEIL: Alright, Mr. White wants to answer the answers.

WHITE: Well, not to disagree specifically, but to amplify my point, which I don't think Mark quite got; it's not true that because 90% of everything is crud -- which by the way, is a dictim of Theodore Sturgeon who is a science fiction writer -- that therefore everything is equal in quality. This is nonsense. It was his *[Mark's]* arguements that if comic books had 90% crud and everything else had 90% crud, comic books were surely no worse. This is nonsense. It is nonsense because what is really going on here is a friction between different attitudes in different groups. The controlling group is a bunch of old men who own the companies, most of whom made their money, semi-legitimately if that around the time of proibition and needed somewhere to put it when prohibition was over and went into pulp publishing and comics publishing. National Comics is a descendant of a distribution combine set up in New York City and it's now owned by Kinney Corporation, which has got a very strange reputation of its own, but we won't go into that either. The people who own these books, the people who publish them, have nothing but contempt for them. I recall somebody telling me, not that long ago, that the man presently in charge of National Comics at the time Kinney acquired them wanted to fold the comics line completely. That's because comics aren't the big money-maker at National; the distribution company, Independent News, is. At Marvel Comics, I suppose things are slightly different, but Marvel is just a branch of Magazine Management Incorporated, which makes a lot of money off a lot of other junk, like various men's trash, men's sweat magazines -- Prong, Thrust, you've seen them all.

O'NEIL: And love them.

WHITE: And these publishers who are used to, the phrase I think is Gerry's, yard goods; it's a totally apt one. These men are not at all interested in the quality of the product they publish. They're interested in getting so much of the product out on such and such a schedule. They could care less whether the product is any good. And if you give them an arguement, why bother with you? They don't need the aggravation; they'll find someone else who won't argue with them. This is the controlling corporate structure that dictates what comic books are. The people who publish them wouldn't be caught dead reading them. Now until they *are* caught dead reading them, there's never going to be much quality involved with them.

O'NEIL: I would like to catch a lot of our executives dead -- reading them.

WHITE: Right. Now at the bottom of this pyramid, you have people who are actually involved in producing them; the writers, the artists, and to a lesser extent, the editors. These people usually are former fans of comics. People who, ten or twenty years ago, through comics were pretty great stuff and never quite outgrew it. And now they're endowed with a certain amount of altruism. They believe there's something worthwhile there that they can do with it if they only get the chance. Now we heard the idea put forth, and it's not an invalid one, I'm not mocking it, that if you can just get in there and work within the system, you can change it. Unfortunately, people who write, edit and draw comic books have never yet succeeded in being the people who dictated the policies of these comics to any real and lasting extent. And almost eve-

Panel members from left to right: DENNY O'NEIL, TED WHITE, GERRY CONWAY

rytime that something that was really good came along, somebody else squashed it. The example of EC is too famous to go into, but EC was deeply offensive to the money-makers at National and they saw to it that EC was put out of the comics business with the Comics Code Authority. This sort of thing goes on. It's a grinding process, and I think most of the people up here have been ground by it. Some of them are willing to admit it and be very honest about it. Denny has said to me, and forgive me if I'm misquoting you on percentages, but something like, if ten percent of whatever of what you write is really good, you're really satisfied, because you know how much you've got to grind out, and you know that a good percentage of it is bound to be junk.

O'NEIL: Twenty percent.

WHITE: Alright. Twenty percent. It's a realistic and honest approach. Alright, there's the other eighty percent. His name goes on that too. Or maybe it doesn't, I don't know. But any time a writer takes a point of view that a good percentage of what he writes, due to the ecstagies of what his writing conditions involve, is going to be crap, and he's essentially apologizing for himself in so doing, you're not going to have an industry that's going anyplace. Now, Mark made a point that he doesn't think the magazines I edit are any better. That's his taste. I disagree with him, and I don't think it's an entirely biased disagreement. I don't work the same way. Nobody has to turn out so many stories a year to satisfy me. I keep what we call a backlog. I have over a hundred stories in that backlog. If nobody sold me any stories for the next year, I'd go right on putting out magazines just with what I've got. And I keep enough of a margin there, that if there's a really slow period where nothing comes in that I like, I don't have to buy it. And I don't. Now my tastes may be defective to the extent that Mark doesn't care for what I publish. I'll take blame for that. But I'm not forcing anyone to meet a deadline day after day, week after week, month after month. And the only deadline I meet myself is in putting the magazines together and trying to find something original to say in the editorials. This, I think, is the way anybody who really is trying to achieve any degree of quality in what he's doing *has* to work. Because the fact of the matter is, it doesn't turn on and off like a faucet. You *can* turn it off and not produce it, turn it on and produce it, even when you're not producing anything of any quality to be sure. The difference between comics and most other medias is what you do with it after you have produced it. In most other medias, you then burn it. In comics, it all goes right into print. Now, I don't think we can really get into an arguement over facts of the way in which comics are produced. What bothers me is that so many people have taken these facts for granted as unchangeable, and it's barely possible they're right. In fact, it's probably more than barely possible. There is no way to change this basic situation, and the situation in comics has been getting progressively worse for the last ten or fifteen years. We've got less publishers active now than ever before in comics. Less publishers meaning more control to fewer people. The people who actually have the control are not the people who know what's going on. They're not the people who have any real creative edge, to use a bad word, they're not people who for the most part, even read the product they publish. They're jerks, most of them. Most of them are people I wouldn't have in my house, and I don't care if they're making a hundred thousand a year. That's not my criteria of what makes a worthwhile person. They're not people I think most of the people on this panel would care to have in their house. Entirely too much in comics is politics, and because I don't have anything to lose by saying so, I'm the one person to say it.

O'NEIL: Okay. I guess I will cop to my perogative as moderator of this thing to answer him first, and then I'll throw it open to everybody else. A lot of what Ted said is a lot of what I said yesterday in the keynote speech.

WHITE: I wish I heard your speech. I'd have enjoyed it.

O'NEIL: Don't be too sure. About businessmen, I have no desire to defend the people who control the industry, but realistically they do control it. And, my favorite quote, if I ever have personal letterhead stationary made up, I'll have this emblazoned across the top, from Dennis Hopper talking about the stuff he had to go through to make EASY RIDER. He said, "If you want to paint the big ceiling, you gotta' deal." Meaning, that Michelangelo, before he could do the Sistine Chappel, had to play all kinds of games with the Pope. I think that's probably a regrettable situation, but it's nothing new. It was true for Michelangelo, and it was true for Einstein, and it's true for us.

WHITE: Oh, bullcrap! It was not true for Einstein. You're overgeneralizing.

O'NEIL: Uh. Let me change my example. It was true for Shakespeare, Dennis Hopper and me, and forget about Einstein. *[Laughter]* Also Michelangelo. It's true for the best art that's been done through the ages. One of the Shakespeare's plays that I find most amusing, *The Merry Wives of Winsor*, which tells what happened to Fallstaff after the references to him in the Henry plays, was written because Queen Elizabeth saw one of the Henry plays, and said, "Hey that's really neat. I'd like to see something else about him -- in two weeks." Shakespeare batted out this little old five act comedy in two weeks, and they got it rehearsed and on the stage. It's always been true. Maybe it won't be someday. To continue about the quality in my own work; yeah, I think I hit it on time in five, frankly. I don't think that the other four books are bad comics. I think that I have to paint the big ceiling and deal. I had a choice many years ago to be a professional writer or to be a weekend writer. When I chose to be a professional, to take the benefits of being a professional, and there are a lot of them, I also realized that I was gonna' have to develop craft and technique to an extraordinary degree, because I wasn't always going to be capable of art. What I try to do when I'm not turned on by a story and what I've tried to do very conscientiously for eleven years, is to learn enough tricks so that at least nobody's bored by it. So that I have enough gimmicks, enough craft things to get through so that you know when you pay your quarter, you're not gypped. About 20% of the time, I can get so enormously excited about a given story that I can't type fast enough and I simply know it's good. I would say, again, that's a pretty normal percentage. Twenty percent of anybody's time, if they're involved with their work at all, they're really functioning as well as they can. The bad writers that Ted was talking about are people who have not paid enough attention to craft and technique, so that when they're bad, they're extraordinarily bad. Thirston the Magician was once arguing with an amatuer magician, and this guy said, "Well, y'know, I can do that card manipulation better than you," and Thirston's answer was, "Yeah, you can do it better than me now, but can you do it better than me for 500 performances a year?" In a nutshell, that's the difference between professional and amatuer. I'm not disdainful of the amatuer attitude. For a lot of reasons I don't think are particularly germain to this discussion, I made my decision to go professional, to take the hassels that are involved with that. It would be awfully nice if I could afford to do only what I thought was the best stuff, but I can't. I'd have to have another job, and well, I don't want to go into that. But, that's what's called being a professional. Now, Ted said that nobody has to do stories for AMAZING and FANTASTIC the way we have to do stories for comic books. Now, your professional writers have to do stories for somebody. The very few professional science fiction writers that I know have to do "x" number of stories a year to make a living. The most screamingly large example is Keith Laumer, who is capable of being a fine writer...

WHITE: Keith Laumer decided he wanted to write at that speed. No one said you have to.

O'NEIL: Well, does he make a living?

WHITE: He makes more than a living. He enjoys doing it at that speed. That's the speed in which he does it whether anyone is asking him or not. Publishers have trouble keeping up with his work.

O'NEIL: Yeah, I know. How many people in the SFWA are full time writers?

WHITE: Not enough.

O'NEIL: Yeah, exactly. Those that are full time writers, and have any kind of financial obligations at all have to turn out so many hundred thousand words of copy a year of some sort.

WHITE: No. You've got two ways of going. One is to turn out a lot of copy. The other is to get a higher rate for yourself. You've got a lot more options when you get outside the comics than you do inside the comics. I don't think you can really draw parallels.

O'NEIL: I think you can draw parallels in that, I like and read AMAZING and FANTASTIC, but a lot of the stuff you publish is not terribly hot. Particularly by professional writers. In fact, you have a very good record of publishing relatively unknown people who have done great stuff. Your professionals are not generally that good. They're just competent stories. All I'm saying is that's generally true of professional writers.

WHITE: No. You have to remember my magazines play the bottom rates of the field. We get to see last, the work that's done by these people you call professionals.

CONWAY: I don't think he's pointing just as much at your magazines than at the entire SF industry.

O'NEIL: I'm talking about being a professional writer, Gerry.

WHITE: Well, being a professional writer means a lot of things to a lot of different people, and you're using it in one sense. But take a man, like for instance, Raymond Chandler, who was a professional writer from the late thirties on, and supported himself by doing nothing but writing. Nonetheless, there's nothing he wrote, until the last few years of his life, that could be considered even remotely bad. You can't say Sturgeon's Law applies to him. I would say that approximately 95% of everything he wrote was really fantastically good. Now this man was a professional writer. There are plenty of people in the field, in the larger field of professional writers, who have found their own ways around this. There are the Alfred Bester's, there are so many other people who have got their own ways around this. There are the Vonneguts for God's sake.

O'NEIL: Bester found a way around it by the simple fact of not being a professional free-lance writer anymore. He signed a contract for Holiday. He went on staff, he went on salary. So, it's a different ball game entirely.

WHITE: If you want to call it that. What do you call yourself? You are signed up to do so many stories for National...

O'NEIL: I am not! I am absolutely a free agent. There's not a contract that exists.

WHITE: Okay, there's not a contract. There's an understanding. You're now an editor.

O'NEIL: I'm a freelance editor. There's nothing on paper. And there's an understanding between Lawhorn and Berkley. I mean, that sort of thing is common. But it doesn't change the basic fact that National doesn't have to buy my next story, nor do I have to write it for them. Bester copped out. He may be doing great stuff for Holiday, but it's not professional freelance writing. Vonnegut did tons of garbage...

WHITE: You say "professional" and "freelance" as though one has to go with the other. You're not a freelance writer. You're a housewriter for National.

O'NEIL: I'm not on anybody's staff.

WHITE: I don't care if you don't have a contract that says you're on anybody's staff or not. You once told me, not that long ago, that you had a guarentee that you would be given "x" number of stories a year to write.

O'NEIL: A verbal agreement.

WHITE: Right. Now it's immaterial whether or not you're considered freelance or staff. You've got a guarenteed amount of work waiting for you any time you want to do it, as long as situations pertain as they presently do.

O'NEIL: If I started writing generally as badly as some other people that National employs, that wouldn't be true. I've got this guarentee as long as I'm productive and professional. Now, it's not like being on staff. I've been on a lot of staffs. If you're on somebody's staff, you can go for 8 months doing bad stuff, and *then* they'll fire you. If I go for 8 months doing bad stuff, I'm dead.

WHITE: Alright. But we're quibbling over definitions here.

O'NEIL: Yeah, we are. Right. To answer, I mean, I think you chose two bad examples to make your point.

WHITE: Which were they?

O'NEIL: Bester, who beat it by stop doing it.

WHITE: No, actually he made his money in television, not from Holiday.

O'NEIL: Well he's the editor, he's on the staff of HOLIDAY MAGAZINE and has been for a long time. I mean, he's stopped doing science fiction. And did other things that pay better. That's how he beat it. And Vonnegut read *Welcome to the Monkey House*. Oh, I bet 80% of the stories you wouldn't buy. They're very bad. Vonnegut admits it in the introduction. He beat it by pandering to a market in the most pandering possible kind of way.

WHITE: But it took him 20 years to accomplish this.

O'NEIL: What I think was happening while he was writing that garbage for COLLIER's and SATURDAY EVENING POST was that he was honing his skills and he was making the good books possible. It's only a guess, but it seems to work that way with freelance -- with people who choose to write for a living. But most of us aren't born-genuises, and we get better with practice. And that seems to me to be one of the big reasons for choosing to be a full time professional writer as opposed to say a teacher who writes on evenings and weekends. You simply have the chance to get better all the time.

WHITE: All right. I think you're restricting yourself to a scope of endeavor and a very narrow area in which you can get better. And people who we have been talking about outside the field have not been restricted to any single medium.

O'NEIL: Well, I agree and I don't restrict myself, as you know.

WHITE: When are you going to write another story for me?

O'NEIL: You'll get it next week. It'll be a masterpiece. You are all witness to this.

Anybody who does only comic books is an idiot, I think. *[Laughter]* No, no! Perhaps that needs some explanation. For one thing, you get stale. Doing any one of anything you get stale. You get bored with it and begin to do bad stuff. Most of the non-fiction that I've done in the last five years, which has involved things -- oh, Lord, everything from researching the facts of all of the presidential elections to interviewing the head of Protacal at the State Department to finding out what sub-atomic particles are, to interviewing a typical New York model. It's all shown up in comic books. My fiction gets fertilized by my non-fiction. That's why I said anybody who restricts themselves to comic books is an idiot, likewise, anybody who restricts themselves to anything is at least denying their professional identities all kinds of possibilities for doing better stuff.

WHITE: You made your point for me. The point...

O'NEIL: This is degenerating into an argument between you and I...

WHITE: All right, wait a minute. Let me just point out one thing here.

O'NEIL: And you're bigger than me so I...

WHITE: You made a very good point here that you do sort of cross-pollenate. The other stuff that you have researched and know has come out in the stuff you've written. One of the things that bothered me, and it's a little thing that bothered me, in this Mike Friedrich story is this notion that you're going to smell the sea surf on the sunset strip. I mean, how many of his readers live in California and know better? They're going to laugh at that, but it's just that -- This is the sort of thing where people read this stuff, and they say, "That's a pile of crap, I know it's a pile of crap, but it's just a comic book." You have this attitude set up, because there's so much simple stupidity in comics. To get away from National for a moment, and take some of you guys off the hook, how many people here know transistors do not supply any power whatsoever, to Iron Man or to anybody else?

FROM AUDIENCE: They generate power.

O'NEIL: They need a battery.

WHITE: Transistors do not generate power. Transistors are just like vacuum tubes

Left to right: MARK HANERFELD, MARV WOLFMAN, LEN WEIN.

divided into a crystal, and so are integrated circuits.

O'NEIL: Segregated circuits on the other hand.

WHITE: There is so much absolute nonsense in comics -- and people even believe it! Now, there are certain things in science fiction that are used in comics, like time travel -- all right, it's accepted nonsense. No one has got the truth on the matter, and therefore you can play whatever comes to your head. But there are other things which are just damned easy to find out about. The thing that has probably annoyed me more than anything else is mutants. The notion that somebody's exposed to radiation and himself mutates into something else is flat out impossible. Mutation works genetically. It's got to be his offspring that are going to be different, if anything.

O'NEIL: How about yellow radiation?

WHITE: God, I don't know. How about yellow radiation? Is that what Superman gets from the sun? I don't know.

O'NEIL: I researched the origin of Green Lantern the other day, and Abin Sur crash landed on earth because he ran into a band of yellow radiation.

WHITE: Obviously an undiscovered belt like the Van Allen Belt. No doubt.

O'NEIL: And how radiation can change color. That's a neat trick.

WHITE: Yeah. Well, see, there you are. These are examples of what I'm talking about. Some are really gross, and some of them are simply, like people who think, for instance, the geography of a city is totally different than it really is. Most comic book writers don't take the trouble to find out. It's not worth it. They don't figure the readers care anyway.

O'NEIL: That stuff appears on nobody's stories on this panel. Nobody here writes that...

WHITE: Doesn't that make you feel virtuous? Isn't that nice?

O'NEIL: You're saying that there's bad writing done, and there's stupidity's committed, and I would be the last to argue. I read this *[JLA # 89]*. I was embarassed by it, and for Harlan, as much as you were. Nobody is going to argue that there's bad writing. There are good writers in comic books, and there are a lot of them sitting around us right now. In fact, maybe most of them. Well, y'know -- who isn't sitting here? Steve Skeates is very good. There's been a tradition of bad writing in comics, and...

WHITE: And that's exactly my point, and that tradition is...

O'NEIL: It's changing.

WHITE: I hope so. It shouldn't be defended then.

O'NEIL: I have no intention of defending this, or BLACK HOOD, or AIR WAVE, or LASH LAROO even.

WHITE: Let's not knock AIR WAVE. AIR WAVE had a very accurate piece on microwaves right after the war.

O'NEIL: I congratulate him. But, I'm going to refer back to what I said yesterday, again. The medium is in a process of evolution. It's getting better.

WHITE: Is it going to evolve before it dies?

O'NEIL: I don't know. It should. Another thing I said, we're all on the deck of a sinking ship. Whether or not we're gonna' beat the water, I can't say. I don't think anybody can. It's nothing that we can even influence, much less control. Okay, let's let me shut up. Does anybody on the panel have anything they want to say?

HANERFELD: Yeah. Two things, actually. First, Theadore Sturgeon is a writer who writes many times, and mainly in science fiction, he's not a science fiction writer. That's personal. Okay.

WHITE: His novelizations are the only non science fiction I know of.

O'NEIL: I think Mark's point is that he writes stories in the science fiction framework, but he doesn't do the John Cambell number.

HANERFELD: Okay, can you tell me the name of your publisher?

WHITE: Sol Cohen.

HANERFELD: Yeah. A real schmuck. Do you know what kind of a thief he is? Do you know how many people that he -- how can I put it nicely -- shafted out of their money? When he was publishing comic books and pulp magazines, all the people up at National I know that worked for him were shafted no end. Kubert and Carmine, everybody. Now, does he read your magazines?

WHITE: No, he doesn't.

HANERFELD: Then why are you knocking National's publisher for not reading their magazines?

WHITE: I'm not knocking them for not reading them. I'm saying these are stupid people who produce these things on a yard goods basis, and are responsible for what's wrong. Sol Cohen, my publisher, is responsible for about 85% of what's wrong with my magazines, largely through penuriousness.

O'NEIL: Which, for the benefit of those of you who haven't gone through college yet, is cheapskate.

WEIN: Let's open this up to the audience.

O'NEIL: Okay. Let's talk to the audience. Yeah.

QUESTION 1: I have a question for Ted White. What did you think of the story Harlan Ellison wrote for the Hulk and the Avengers?

WHITE: I thought it was terrible, to be honest with you. I didn't think it was well-plotted even. I thought Roy Thomas' general level of achievement is much higher without Harlan. It was a couple years ago that Roy told me that Harlan was going to do this thing for him, and that he wanted me to do something for him, and he got, I think -- Mike Moore-

cock has done something for him. And some other people. And I haven't done anything for him yet because I'm not about to do anything my name goes on until I've got some pride in it. I don't despise the comics field at all, but it's not going to be something -- it's a hard thing when we talk about Harlan and what Harlan has done. Harlan is an enormously talented person, whose largest blind-spot is himself. There's no self-critical ability whatsoever. And maybe ten years from now, I'll say to him, "Harlan, what did you think of that thing you did for the Hulk and the Avengers?" and he'll say, ""I don't want to talk about it." Right now, he's pleased as punch his name is printed.

O'NEIL: Okay. Another question.

QUESTION 2: *[Tony Isabella]* You've been talking a lot about comics as art. But comics are essentially entertainment, and now, okay, these guys here don't always hit it; you don't always have great stuff. But if it entertains me that's all I'm asking; that's all a lot of people are asking.

O'NEIL: That's all I shoot for, ever. I think I have some control over that. I think that I'm witty enough and inventive enough so that I can usually be entertaining. If I hit anything else, it's gravy. Len, do you want to speak to that?

WEIN: Yeah, I agree. That's all I write for is for entertainment's sake. That's why I always felt I was writing -- it's an entertainment medium. I write stories I feel are exciting, I hope, that I feel are interesting. I hope they hold your interest to the end. That's all I'm concerned about; that they're as good as I can make them, and that they interest you. That's what I'm writing for.

ISABELLA [Cont]: Len wrote a series for Gold Key --MOD WHEELS-- one of the stupidest ideas around -- the comic entertains me. It's well done. That's all I ask. And I don't see why...

WHITE: Well, now if you regard it as the stupidest idea around, what is it about it that entertains you? Is it in spite of it?

ISABELLA [Cont]: Yes. Len tells a story that keeps my attention for as long as I'm reading it, and that's all I ask for in a comic book; that's all I ask from any book.

WHITE: So, in other words, he's overcome an obstacle right off the bat, which maybe he didn't have to do. If he could entertain in spite of that, think how much better he might be able to entertain you if there wasn't a stupid idea in his way.

ISABELLA [Cont]: Well, I was just pointing it out. All I ask from comics is that they entertain me. Now, if he overcomes a stupid idea, or whether he has a good idea in the beginning, it doesn't matter to me. I'm entertained. And that's why I bought that comic. The money I spent was for entertainment.

WHITE: I think this brings up a very good point. What's entertaining to people. Do things that are entertaining automatically have to be inferior to things that are quote, "good," unquote. I don't think so. I think the better they are the more entertaining they are. I don't think there's a conflict.

CONWAY: Not necessarily. Many people don't think WAR AND PEACE is terribly entertaining, but the reading is very good.

O'NEIL: It's not fun-light reading at all. But if you can plow through it, you're a different person in the end. That's what I think art, at its peak, at its highest, does. I don't make that claim for comic books. I don't make that claim for very much. Maybe there are two dozen works of art in the whole history of western culture that do that. I don't think comic books have come within a million miles, nor are they likely to. I don't despise entertainment. It's a hard thing to do to be amusing; and it's a valuable thing. Okay. Another question.

QUESTION 3: To Ted White. Do you feel that too many facts will detract from ficticious writing?

WHITE: It's all in the way they're presented. Look, if you're writing a story, and you have things taking place -- protagonist gets in his car, goes from here to there. Alright. There are certain basic facts that you accept. As the fundamental of how the guy got in his car and how he went. You don't even have to state them, they're understood. But let's suppose you ignore these facts. Let's suppose he got in his car, and... I don't know, something silly, something absurd, drove backward the whole way. Anything.

CONWAY: It took him twenty minutes to get into New York.

WHITE: Alright, yeah. Here's a simple fact. Suppose a guy gets in an airplane in Washington DC and flies to Los Angeles and gets off the plane an hour later. Well, not even with the SST, which we don't have...

O'NEIL: Thank God.

WHITE: Could you do that. And this is a simple fact; it doesn't have to be ignored, but if someone does ignore it, and you notice it, you're going to say, "Aw, that's dumb," and it stops you; it slows you down, it detracts from your entertainment. It takes you out of the story and makes you criticize it, consciously, or unconsciously. When you read something that you know is wrong, you say, "Aw, that's wrong." Now, of course, every so often, I used to read -- see, I grew up in this area, the Washington area -- every once in a while I'd read a story that was set in the Washington area. Not many are. New York is the place where most stories are set. But sometimes they obviously knew Washington. Sometimes they didn't. Sometimes they thought the Pentagon was in the middle of Washington. For most people, I don't suppose this mattered. It bothered me. Well, there's going to be some things that you know, that you accept, that you assume everybody else knows, and if someone comes along and contradicts it in a story through ignorance, it takes you out of the story, it detracts from the story. You've got to overcome that, get back into the story again. To this extent, someone who got his facts wrong is hurting the story. I'm not saying he's got to load the story up with facts, that's not true at all.

Left: Ted White Right: Gerry Conway

O'NEIL: I concur for exactly the reasons he said. If you're going to use a fact in a mass medium, you have to figure that a number of people will know, and it gets in the way of their enjoying the story, just on the amusement level, if they get pulled up short by something they know is obviously a mistake. It's bad craftsmanship.

WHITE: I'll give you an example. There's a couple of Gold Medal books that came out recently. The first is called NO SCORE, and the second was called CHIP HARRISON SCORES AGAIN. They're supposedly written by Chip Harrison, who I think is my old friend, Larry Block, but I haven't asked him. And they're light-weight, fun books to read. He's got a nice, low-key realism to it. The protagonist in the story is 17, in the beginning of the first book, and you feel that everything that's happening to him could happen to someone at that age. They're nothing really fantastic, but they're amusing things. It's sort of a semi-humorous book. In the end of the second book, a woman gives him her 1954 Cadillac with a stick shift and he drives it and he remarks on the stick shift. Well, it just happens that I've owned cars of that vintage. I know that there are no 1964 Cadillacs with stick shifts. They all came out with automatics. The same thing happens in any area, y'know. This is what I'm talking about. Somebody is going to find out about it.

O'NEIL: Okay. Another question.

QUESTION 4: What is your opinion of the latest GREEN LANTERN?

O'NEIL: My opinion? Oh, Ted's. *[Laughter]*

WHITE: Well, now you say the latest. You mean the latest on the stands. The first drug issue, that's the latest I've seen. I thought it ended with great impact. I saw that building, of course. It was pretty obvious to me that was the ending you were building towards. What was the kid doing there.

QUESTION 4 [Cont]: It was on the cover.

WHITE: Yeah, that's true too. *[Laughter]* I felt that it was probably the most honest treatment of drugs I've seen in comics to date, and that it was no more than 50% accurate. I've talked to Denny about this, so we won't pursue the point. It's an oversimplification, it's got a lot of melodramatic parts to it that really don't have any reality and I'm afraid that the kids that he's trying to reach, to say something to, know enough to say, this is crap.

O'NEIL: That's Ted's opinion. I do not concur. First rule of being a writer: Don't ever try to defend your own work. Another question.

QUESTION 5: I'd like Ted to clarify something. A while ago you said that Denny could write ten times better than he does for comics, but that he probably wouldn't because it would be inappropriate for the medium. You said inappropriate for the medium, you didn't say inappropriate for the editor. Are you trying to say that the medium is incapable of having good work...

WHITE: I was talking to Denny last night, and he made pretty clear to me that he writes what he writes, and the editors don't mess with him. Is that correct?

O'NEIL: Now it is, yeah. Generally.

WHITE: He's gotten to a point now where he can pretty well dictate his own terms within specific limits. He still can't show anybody getting seduced, or anything. You can't write a tale on white slave trade in New York City, or any of that crap. We're not going to see hot pants...

O'NEIL: Yeah, but is there anybody here who doesn't know what's really going on between Green Arrow and Black Canary, hmmm? *[Laughter]* Okay, go on.

WHITE: All right, just from what we've been talking about last night, I said it that way because I didn't assume that the editors had that much control. Previous to last night, I had assumed the editors did. And I think still, to an extent, Denny must be sub-consciously allowing for what he thinks he can get away with with different editors. And, I think just judging from the fact -- Denny has written one short science fiction story which he sold to me. And I read it, and it wasn't the greatest story that came down the pike, but it was a nice story. And the prose in it, the basic prose level of competency --this is something I notice that probably most people don't notice because I'm involved with it-- the prose level in that story is ten times better than the prose level of his comic book writing. Now, I'm not convinced that there's a big enough difference between comics and other forms of writing that this has to pertain. I'm partly convinced that it may be true, because I think you can get too prosey in writing for comics. I think you can clutter panels up --I was talking to Denny about this-- just putting too much into a panel of descriptive mood-setting stuff that isn't necessary to advance your story. It's obvious that comics are more an art medium than a writing medium. All of these really great pages like the one that was in IMPACT by Bernie Krigstein, of the guy getting run over by the subway. With no panel copy on it at all. That's because it was a shorter story that he made a page longer by putting that copy-less page in, because he got the lettering done first before he did the story. This is a case which shows us how much more important the art really is. And the writing and the art, ideally, should be done by the same person, providing he's really competent in both, because then it's welded together. Denny, when he's working with an artist like Neal Adams, they're together. When he's working with an artist like Don Heck, God only knows. We shall see. Clearly, he's not working under the most optimum conditions, where he does the best writing for comics. I think, probably, if I think of the best writing in comics, I think of people like -- the vintage Spirit and some of the best Harvey Kurtzman war comics. Archie Goodwin's BLAZING COMBAT. Things like this, which were well-written, had good visual impact, none of the elements fought with each other. And I don't see this happening in comics right now.

HANERFELD: May I add something? We have something new coming up in comics. I don't think it existed before. It may have on a personal basis in shops. Denny and Neal Adams, for instance, work very closely on stories. Denny doesn't have to put in the balloons because he knows what Adams is going to draw ahead of time; and Adams knows what Denny is going to write ahead of time because they think along the same track. Len wrote a story with Berni Wrightson, SWAMP THING; the two of them worked it out together.

WHITE: This is the ideal situation, obviously.

HANERFELD: Each knew what they were going to do and it worked out beautifully.

WHITE: They should be turned on by what each other is doing.

HANERFELD: But, they don't need only one person in each book.

O'NEIL: Okay. We have five minutes, so let's take another question.

QUESTION 6: I'd like to know what happens when an artist and writer work together, when they don't match at all, they have two different reactions.

WHITE: They blame each other.

O'NEIL: Len, answer that.

QUESTION 6 [Cont]: Which one usually winds up telling his story the most?

WEIN: Generally, the artist. What happens when you have an artist and a writer that don't mesh together, it doesn't turn out to be a good story, generally.

HANERFELD: Relate the Hot Wheels story.

WEIN: Alex Toth drew a Hot Wheels story about a year and a half back, that was a strong, emotional story, I thought. It went out to Alex Toth, who was handling the rest of the job out on the coast -- pencilling, the inking, fortunately not the lettering. When it came back from the coast, to be lettered, Alex had decided that he could do better pictures by doing certain things and took out 90% of the emotion of the story -- which was the story. I spent an entire week-end rewriting everything all over again to fit what Alex had drawn. Because he hadn't told my story at all, he told his story, what he felt he could get away with drawing well. It worked out beautifully, the artwork was brilliant. The man is a brilliant artist, but he isn't a writer, and it showed.

[Technical flaw: Last question not recorded]

Keynote Speech by DENNY O'NEIL

Delivered at METRO-CON II

Transcribed and Prepared for Publication by Gary Groth

Good morning and welcome. I would like to thank almost all of you for showing up; I would thank all of you except that given that this is Washington D.C. I'm sure that there are at least 6 of you who are FBI agents cunningly disguised as funny book freaks. And to those of you who are in the employ of the federal government, I must say that although the villain in GREEN LANTERN 83 looked like Spiro Agnew, talked like Spiro Agnew, acted like Spiro Agnew, and even smelled like Spiro Agnew, he was not Spiro Agnew. And if you believe that, see me later and I'll sell you the Washington Monument.

I should also confess that I have a SUPERMAN story coming out in which Lex Luthor is revealed to be J. Edgar Hoover. He invents this new kind of kryptonite; grape kryptonite. He slips it into Supie's malted milk. Grape kryptonite hits Superman like last night hit me. So he kind of weaves back to his Fortress of Solitude, not very much like a speeding bullet, and he goes through the door, without opening it, and he lurches around and he drinks the bottle city of Kandor.

I would also like to address some varied remarks at the con committee for scheduling this thing at the ungodly hour of 11:30. Con Committee, do you have any idea what time free-lance writers go to bed, if ever? And in what condition? Anyway, for the rest of you, thank you for showing up.

There's a writer who didn't do comics; his name was Charles Dickens. He opened a book with the words, "It was the best of times, and the worst of times." He was writing about the French Revolution. His sentence applies more strongly to the United States of America in the beginning of the decade that I think will be called the Dreadful Seventies, the Scary Seventies, and more particularly, the microcosm of the United States of America, the comic book industry, the pecuiliar folk art that we practice that's kind of a bastard son of creativity in yard goods. I'll talk about the worst of it first because I want to end on an upbeat note. Rah, rah.

It should be no secret to anyone who follows this medium very closely that we are in terrible trouble, financially. There is one Kinney business analyst who says that either Marvel or National is going to sink within the next year, such is the state of competition -- it's reached a cut-throat stage. That, according to this analyst, one company or the other will go under. They both can't survive in this particular economic situation. I think he may be a little bit of a doomsdayer; but not all that much of a doomsdayer. I've talked to other people about this. They said, "Oh come on, there's always going to be a Superman, there's always going to be a Batman. They're folk institutions."

When I was growing up, it was unthinkable that there wouldn't be a Collier's Magazine. Before that it was unthinkable that there wouldn't be a buttonhook industry. Around 1900, people said there would always be a need for buggy whips. It's not only comic books. The whole publishing industry is in trouble, even PLAYBOY's sales are off. If a centerfold can't sell magazines, Lois Lane doesn't have a prayer.

The reasons for this are long and complicated and pretty gruesome. Let's see; there are no publishers in the audience, so I can be honest and say that for thirty-some odd years, the comic book business has been mismanaged hideously. It's been run by accountants. All they did was push out the stuff under the deadline and wait for the profits to roll in. They did virtually nothing that a luxury industry does in order to survive. Such as advertise outside the medium, make market surveys. The only market survey that I have seen in the six years I have been involved in this business was that lame-assed thing that National put into its books a few months ago, they had a questionaire, y'know, "HEY GANG! LET'S RAP!" I would think nobody learned anything from that except that Kinney executives shouldn't be allowed within six feet of a typewriter.

Then, they sign some pretty interesting contracts with little fiendish people you never hear about -- they're called distributors and wholesalers. The Kinney people -- it's to their credit, it's a little late, but they're trying to do something about the conditions that led to this state of doom. They're investigating; they're finding out that distributors are robbing them blind, literally robbing them blind. Distributors are also serving as de facto censors. There's one southern state in which any comic book by Neal Adams or myself doesn't get on the stands because of GREEN LANTERN 76 which was very strongly pro-black. And because

of the aforementioned GREEN LANTERN 83, which was very strongly anti-administration. (And, by the way, they haven't seen nothing yet). So, this guy decides we're evil commies or something and he's not going to take our magazines off the boxcar. I can even respect him because at least he's got some kind of ideoligical position. There are other creeps who take the magazines off the boxcar, cut off the logo, sell the magazine in the second-hand market for what they can get -- 2 or 3 cents; then they send the logo back to National and get credit, the full 15¢ or whatever it is.

The way it works is that they don't have to send the whole magazine back. They send the logo back, they say, "I didn't sell this magazine, here's proof, here's the logo, give me my money." Well, National has hired Ed Lolacher, who has found out in many cities they simply send the logo back and to compound that obscenity, National has signed contracts with other distributors where they don't even have to go to the trouble of mailing back the logo. National takes their word for how many magazines they sold. *[Laughter]*

Maybe that's being a good businessman in the land of Oz, I don't know. That, and the recession. That's a nasty word, particularly in Washington. *[Whispering]:* (But, President Nixon, we're in a recession). Comic books are a luxury item. They will be among the first things to go. If it gets any tighter, people can't afford luxuries. They'll get their entertainment from television -- free. So, for all those reasons, this is the worst of times to be involved in this particular medium of art-form industry.

And it's the best of times. Because I think after thirty some-odd years, comic books are finding themselves. I think that they're maturing. The people in the business are doing good work now, know what they want to do, they know how to use the medium, they know what it is. They are in it because they love it. Somebody like Neal Adams could make 2 or 3 times as much money as he does doing advertising. He stays in comics because he's tremendously involved in it as an art form. The people that have come into the business in the last, oh, say 5, 10 years, are in it simply because they love doing comic books. There is not one of us that hasn't proven that we could work in other media as artists, as writers, whatever. I have been accused of writing relevant, quote, comic books. And I guess I'll cop to that, yeah. I write about things that bug me, and things that bug Neal Adams; it takes two of us. But, in a sense, comic books have always been relevant in the way that any folk art or publishing is relevant. I think they've always been a kind of reflecting mirror of the preoccupations and fears and hopes of their audience, which has been the lower middle class in the United States of America. I think of the way comics, the things that came out in say, '39 to '45. You have all these Nazis and you have these fanged, slanty-eyed Japanese. In the fifties, the country was pretty dull as a whole. And comic books were terribly dull. Month after month Batman got involved with giant toothpaste tubes. Part of that, of course, was the Code. We all know about the Code, and we all know about Freddy Wertham, boy psychiatrist. I don't want to get into that very much, except to say that if the country as a whole hadn't been in the throes of a kind of blandness-bla, they wouldn't have been able to be so panicked by Wertham. And the comic book industry would not have so virtually sold out everything in order to placate a few doomsdayers. It was the McCarthy era and there was a lot of doomsdaying around.

In the sixties, it got a lot better. '62, it was pretty exciting to be alive in this country. It was pretty exciting to be a young person. There was the counter culture that was getting full blown. There was rock music, there was a president, who, you may or may not have agreed with his policies, but you had to admit he was an exciting man. There was a feeling of possibility, and our medium began to reflect that, particularly through the offices of Stan Lee. I've had many disagreements with Stan in the past, and I fully expect to go on having disagreements with Stan in the future, but I have to admit he taught us a way of writing superheroes, he taught us a way of doing characterization in comic books, and there isn't one of us who's writing well that would be writing well had it not been for him. So he helped. The country as a whole helped. We began getting good then. Not just isolated incidents, but a lot of people began to get good at this medium. It was of -- well, there are a lot of factors that went into it, but this country as a whole was as responsible as anything else for this sudden flower.

And then came Dallas, and that motel room balcany down south, that kitchen in a Los Angeles hotel, and Nixon, and the terrible thing that was the last presidential election. Camelot is gone. The country began to doubt. We had three magnificent men killed, and then, we were treated to the spectacle of their assasins dying, one of them on national television. It was a horrible thing for a country to go through. It changed everybody's head, and again, comic books, like old folk art, reflect the nation that spawns them. So, our super heroes are scared and doubting and no longer easily content as they were. . I think we're in the peculiar situation of being on a sinking ship, and yet, great stuff is happening while the water is coming over our heads. Partially because the publishers are so scared themselves that they're willing to give the artists and writers freedom. Their formulas don't work. There was a time, around '65, when you could put anything between the covers of a magazine, and throw it on the newsstands and it would sell. We all remember, fondly I trust, the Mighty Comics line. Well, the formulas don't work anymore, the publishers and the businessmen don't have any substitutes for it. The stories that sold a million copies of SUPERMAN in 1942 isn't going to do it now. Result: They're letting the writers and artists have some shots. Neal and I are doing GREEN LANTERN because the book was dying and it wasn't going to sell another issue. So they figured, why the hell not, why not let these guys, what can we lose?

So, we have the peculiar situation where if a lot of people who are finally getting skills and the ability-making of the art, to really use comic books, and more freedom than the medium has ever had before, and a country that is in the throes of some kind of terror, some kind of agony -- all this sounds pretty pessimistic. I promised this was going to be the happy part -- so, to finish making this point, I'd like to read something. There's going to be some GREEN LANTERN/GREEN ARROW paperbacks coming out, reprints mostly. Samuel R. Delaney, a science fiction writer wrote the introduction to one and I wrote the introduction to the second, and after putting out a few words about who Green Lantern and Green Arrow are, I wrote this:

"I am fortunate enough to be one of Green Lantern's historians -- a superhero's Boswell. Neal Adams, surely the most gifted artist in our medium, is the other. Together, we relate the exploits of the Lantern and his friend and sometimes-conscience, Green Arrow. At first, I reluctantly admit, we exaggerated. The villains Green Lantern bested weren't always real. We took a few minor liberties with strict truth. Lately, though, those liberties haven't been necessary. We've looked at our nation and we've had to agree with Green Arrow when he said: 'It's a good country ... beautiful ... fertile ... and terribly sick. There are children dying ... honest people cowering in fear ... disillusioned kids ripping up campuses. Something is wrong. Something is killing us all. Some hideous moral cancer is rotting our very souls.'

"Well, maybe the Arrow is a trifle over-eloquent -- as the Lantern told me, the archer does tend to get carried away -- but we can't fault what he says. So we've stopped exaggerating, and started telling stories of the Lantern's and Arrow's clashes with the 'hideous moral cancer.'

"We hope they entertain you. It is always the business of mythology to entertain and -- make no mistake about it -- superheroes are mythology as certainly as Odysseus or Paul Bunyan, personifications of what a civilization feels is best in itself. However, Neal, our editor, Julius Schwartz, and I can hope this book is more than amusing. We asked the Arrow to explain and he was, predictably, willing.

"Listen to him:

"'Look, you guys show the ring slinger and me charging around, getting into trouble, once in a while stomping a crud who *needs* stomping. Oh, we blow it now and again, and the crud hands us *our* head. Then we screw it back on and go back and eventually we *win*. Cozy up to the fact -- we *win*. We beat the problems, they don't beat us. I want to tell the kids, the readers, "If we can do it, you can too." Don't let the scummies inherit the earth. Don't let pollution, corruption, crime, drugs, the whole ugly bag smother you. Fight 'em and keep fighting till you've got 'em hacked. Any politico who calls America a "pitiful, helpless giant" can take his campaign posters and shove them up...'

"'Easy, Arrow,' Green Lantern says. 'You really *do* get carried away. You're only saying we Twentieth-Century myths are trying to counteract defeatism. We are, yes. It's a big part of our job.'

"'The biggest,' replies the Arrow. 'Otherwise, you'd be a suburban daddy and I'd be coaching a girl's archery team.'

"And *our* job -- Adam's, Schwartz's, and mine -- is to produce comic books. Entertainments. We offer samples now."

I wrote those words about two months ago and I see no reason to change them. I used the metaphor of a sinking ship before and that's generally unworthy of someone who travels in intergalactic-space as I do, so let's change the metaphor and say the word spaceship, and there's a big hole in the hull. All the air is going out there. And Neal Adams' ink is freezing in his pen and my typewriter keys are becoming all gnarled and twisted. Maybe somebody is going to plug that hole, and maybe they're not. In the meantime, Neal's going to keep scratching away with the frozen ink and I'm going to keep beating the typewriter. And we're going to keep producing these entertainments, this instant mythology, and I think we're going to have a helluva good time doing it. Thank you. *[Applause]*

keynote speech by STERANKO

Transcribed and prepared for publication by Gary Groth

Attending this convention will probably be people from every single facet of comic art; artists, writers, publishers, editors; pros and fans. Fans that are aspiring to be pros. They all have one thing in common. All of us love comic art. Often I'm asked about the future of comics. God only knows I've spent a lot of time digging into the past, into the history. I've just spent five months writing another book on it. One thing strikes me as kind of peculiar. Don't take my word for it; pick up a comic book from the 1930's and then pick up a comic from 1971 and you'll be suprised to find out that they're exactly the same. In almost 40 years the comic medium has not expanded its format. It's really kind of suprising, because when the Wright brothers flew for the first time, if they had projected ahead 40 years, they would have found man going 10, 20 times that speed. Comics have stayed the same. Why?

Because publishers want to make money. It's the job of the artists, the writers and the editors to produce creative books. All the publisher is suppose to do is make money because that's his job. I often hear fans criticize National, Martin Goodman, Sal Gentile and other people for not putting out extravagant, experimental books. They don't want to; they never will. They can't. They have responsibilties to themselves and to the people that back them and God only knows when you start losing someone else's money - you're out looking for another job.

The future of comics. I can't help thinking about one man in particular who broke that mold, the publisher's mold. His father almost *invented* the comic book; Max Gaines. When Max died, his son, Bill Gaines took over. *Pioneer Stories, Picture Stories From the Bible.* He turned it into a line of books that featured titles like *Frontline Combat, Weird Science, The Haunt of Fear.* I don't think there's any doubt in anybody's mind that in retrospect, these were the best comics ever produced. As a line of comics, they've never been equaled. Bill experimented and lost money. The books bombed, except for his horror titles; they did well. However, Bill experimented with a book called *Mad.* It's not the title of a comic book. Bill didn't care. He put out 23 issues of *Mad,* then changed the format. I don't have to tell you the success that it's been. One experiment out of perhaps fifteen, and it's become a financial success. So, you see, experiments do work if you're willing to take the chance.

Now, about the future of comics. I'm looking at it. You people in this room, five or ten or twenty years from now may be publishing books yourselves. So, just remember this: This day, when somebody comes to you with an idea and tells you about making money, maybe you can afford to take a chance. *Expand that medium you love; work on it, make something worthwhile out of it. Thank you.* [Applause]

BOOK REVIEW
alan brennert
the bite of monsters, by dennis o'neil

In a field populated by writers who allow pictures to tell their story for them -- and no matter how glowing the accompanying narrative prose might be, this is and must be the case, by the very nature of comic books -- a writer who actually uses that prose to the support and benefit of a story is considered something of a reactionary and, sadly, a genuis. The real test must come when that writer is shorn of his pictures, of his short-cuts and his convienences, and must tell a story without the assistance of a Neal Adams or a Dick Dillin.

Denny O'Neil has shown this capability many times -- N.B. his short story, "The Elseines" (F&SF, Febuary 1972) and, to stretch a point, the short-short, "The Iconoclasts" (FANTASTIC, April 1971). He is quite able to paint a word-picture that is encompassing, dramatic and affecting. This ability, however, is evident only in the smallest degree in his first novel, *The Bite of Monsters,* which Belmont has wisely decided to either completely ignore or hope that the public shall do the same.

Of the book, O'Neil has said, "It's a terrible book, and I'll beat hell out of anyone I catch with a copy." You need not fear for your health. O'Neil's statement seems to me more than false modesty or a bid for increased sales. I have the terrible feeling that he *means* it, actually *did* lose interest in his own book halfway through, and completed it only perfunctorily. As evidence: toward Chapter Thirteen he unravels the threads of an already-stringy plot in two to three pages of kindergarten-level exposition, thinly rationalized by the "explanation" that the protagonist, Noah, is indeed mentally but a child and must be treated accordingly. (This does not explain why his companion, Jane -- Burroughs help us, the parallel is there! -- not being at all childlike, would not have received the information on a more intelligent level since it was, after all, being sent telepathically). Add to this some self-deprecating lines given to the third major protagonist, the bat-winged Jonah: "If we *are* living a poem, I think it must be a trashy effort, indeed -- the lit class project of an accounting student. ...Ideally, we'll find this Ike Creature and learn from him -- or it -- the reasons for this hackneyed charade." The triteness of the story thus established by the author himself, one might at least hope for characterization to hold together a spastic plot -- but again we are to be denied.

The setting is a near-future Earth -- well enough into the future so as to be reflective upon the "Chicago movement of the 'eighties," but not too advanced so as to blot the memory of Raquel Welch films, Geritol or Eagle Scouts. Some things, apparently -- aging sex symbols, quack medicinal therapies, and the Boy Scouts of America, among them -- never change.

The situation is mundane. Earth has been conquered and occupied by "snakelike aliens," as the cover blurb puts it -- "serpies" to the few humans left on the planet. The protagonists are Noah, an Oedipal figure born and bred by the serpies, trained for violence, stupidity, and a thoroughly ambiguous mission for which they implant in his skull a radio transmitter which promptly fizzles out at the first blow in combat (one would think the serpies would have taken that into account, having after all trained him for combat); Jonah, a transformed ex-professor of Humanities with a fondness for poetry and talk, and whom is referred to by the story's obligatory rotten apples as "the bat man" (O'Neil, it seems, is unable to resist such offensive conceits); Jane, the story's heroine of sorts, who of course turns out to be both latent telepath and human serpie halfbreed; and, finally, Captain Holland and his roving band of Patriots, O'Neil's favorite type of villains -- fascist rednecks who take the constitution as literally as my crazy Aunt Elsie does the Bible. Their speech patterns are predictable enough; Noah, raised on "genteel British novels," fluctuates between genteel Victorian and Tarzan grunts-and-groans; Jonah speaks in long, rambling dissertations that are, at least, amusing; Holland & Co. are restricted to monosyllabic cliches, an alarming percentage of them four-lettered (what the hell qualifies someone to be addressed as "shit-ears"?); while Jane speaks remarkable English for never having seen the inside of a school. (The serpies themselves speak in long, static dialogues written like playscripts; "LEADER: How is the specimen? DOCTOR: He thrives. MECHANIC: All is well." This may do wonders for increasing the length of the book, but as a realistic notion of telepathy it went out years ago, Heinlein's *Time for the Stars* notwithstanding).

The Patriots' former leader, someone by the name of Pappy, has to be the most incredibly cardboard figure in the book. He sits for hours on end staring at a blank television set, insisting there are images coming through, and his sole speech goes something like this:

> *"'It is our beholden duty to keep our honor clean and rid this hallowed soil of the influences both domestic and otherwise to temper mercy with justice and protect our sacred womanhood so that our children may breathe the pure air of racial purity and boys if that means we got to kill a couple kikes and niggers then we'll kill them and those communists who practice their insidious wiles in the schools and universities must be purged also, I do depose one nation under God,' said Pappy, and returned his stare to the television set."*

Furthermore, the Patriots do not believe that the serpies are aliens, but devils -- devils kicked out of heaven on their ass who, for some reason, feel compelled to take it out on Earth. But God has second thoughts (he always does) and decided to send His Only Begotten Son, name of the Ike, to Earth, where he is being held prisoner by the serpies and when he is freed the Earth will be humanity's once more forever and ever amen.

So much for the plot. Even William Atheling does not flog a dead horse, particularly when the animal has performed the feat by himself.

I could point out some glaring flaws in science, but I shan't; a working knowledge of science is not a requisite for writing SF, though it helps. A story can be devoid of scientific detail and still succeed, on its own terms -- by merit of its characterizations, for instance.

Put it this way. O'Neil *needs* the science.

No one of the characters ever comes to life for more than an instant before O'Neil smashes them to a pulp with a pompous, lofty narrative that is omnipotent and intrusive. "Ponder this character," O'Neil asks the reader, thereby defeating his own purpose; in one breath he is telling us to *feel* for this character, but remember that he is just a piece of fiction and you really aren't *obligated* to feel any rapport with him. Characterization through action, through character conflict (an idea that O'Neil endorses, *must* endorse if he is to achieve any characterization in comics)is practically nonexistant. Jonah, the winged professor, achieves a certain grandeur toward the end of the book, but it is Hollywood grandeur, that final shot of the hero being escorted to heaven by angels dripping anthropomorphism; pure melodrama.

Damon Knight places an author's flowering, if he is to flower at all, on his third book; if he can survive the traditional ordeal "of writing a second." (For those who doubt, e.g. Norman Spinrad). If indeed O'Neil can expand his attention through that ordeal in order to witness that flowering which I know to be possible.

The Bite of Monsters, by Dennis O'Neil [Belmont B75-2134/75¢; 156 pages]

balloons from our readers

[The last magazine Fantagraphics published was the FANTASTIC FANZINE SPECIAL II, over a year ago, of which WORD BALLOONS is actually a revised continuation of. That 84-page landmark issue invoked much comment; therefore we chose to devote one page of this issue to commentary on our last book. FF SPECIAL II is still available from Fantagraphics for $2.00, postpaid].

Dave Hogan
6400 Center St. # 50
Mentor, Ohio 44060

Joe Sinnott is my kind of guy. Knowledgeable, cooperative, and enthusiastic. John Severin gave an interview to GRAPHIC STORY MAGAZINE not too long ago, and all through it I got the impression that Severin is not really happy at what he does. That he'd rather be doing something totally different from comics. Sinnott's attitude is so bright that the interview was a genuine pleasure to read. Though he expressed a dislike for the "grind" of comics work, his satisfaction will undoubtedly give hope to many aspiring comics artists.

Joe's reminiscences about the early days of the Comics Code made me tremble. I really find it amazing that Stan Lee and everybody else didn't just chuck the whole thing and get out of comics. The Comics Code is a horror story worse than any EC ever came up with...

The convention coverage was all very nicely done. I especially enjoyed Martin Pasko's Kirk Alyn article, which was disturbingly ironic and also a little sad. The interview with Phil Seuling was great. Light and humorous, but not completely so.

Other features were interesting, even the Captain Savage article, which could have been very bad. Art throughout was up to your usual high standards -- the beautiful illustration by Wrightson of the GhouLunatics was the best in the issue, with Fujitake's centerspread not far behind. Layout and reproduction were excellent from cover to cover.

I am looking forward to your next issue.

Roger Schoolcraft
2015 Eldersville Road
Follansbee, West Virginia 26037

Sorry to hear about Tony Isabella's departure, but I'll be happy to read Jim Wilson's column. His FF Control satire was great, combining humor and drama in one damn good story. It's about the best fan satire I've ever read!

Jim Wilson's "The Anderson Incident" has invoked the most response of any one feature FANTASTIC FANZINE ever printed (with the exception of the Steranko interview, in FF 11). An updated version of Jim's column will appear next issue as will another "FF" Control satire (updated and revised) that was meant to follow The Anderson Incident. I have read the second draft of this manuscript and it's even better than Jim's The Anderson Incident.

Dave Dapkewicz
113 Lehigh Avenue
Wind Gap, PA 18091

The John Adkins Richardson interview was excellent. I'm glad to see you didn't use the "questionaire" thing you've used for the past few FF interviews. Most people don't respond well to randomly picked questions, and interviews aren't really much good if any kind of coherent discussion doesn't evolve. Many interesting things came out of the interview, which wouldn't have had use of the "straight and narrow" form continued. There were times when I wished you'd have let him continue, and the G.B. Love discussion was quite enjoyable. I don't consider him quite the fiend you do; prices, for a good part, don't bother me, unless they're ridiculously overpriced (I even paid Rogofsky $15.00 for SPA FON # 2). So, it's a difference of personal ethics between you and I. As he answered, "it's of annoyance to some, of no importance to others," or words to that effect.

Wilson's FF Control satire was tremendous, really tremendous. The kind of stuff with a bite that's lacking in most satires. Some of it could have been a bit more subtle, but it was fine nonetheless. I'm kind of sorry to hear "Highest Castle, Deepest Grave" will be filling in Tony Isabella's excavation. The "personal problems" are unfortunate, to say the least. Tony will be missed.

And Gordon Matthews "Filling The Gaps" is a well-done, interesting, and very true opinion piece. Matthews, despite my put-down of his story in FF 13, is a good writer, humor-wise and opinion-wise, though I've not seen any of his "straight stuff," if, indeed, he does any. Though I've not seen BPP stuff, the writers list is exceptional, but the underlying tone of "We supreme writers aren't accepted by all publications as the greats we are but should be" almost turned me off. Writers, I admit, are very, very important to a 'zine, and have been neglected. But by trying to shame an editor into accepting anything just on Matthews' sayso is not the correct means of acceptance. Sure, artists wouldn't have anything to draw about if there were no writers, but, then again, an illustration can add immensely to even the best stories. Howards' CONAN never would have been accepted by the unknowledgeable readers had Frazetta not given a certain mood or characterization to Conan. I may be wrong, but, as the saying goes, "a picture is worth a thousand words." And whether Gordon cares to admit it or not, it is true. Writers are important, maybe more important than an artist, I don't know. But a "writer" like Thomas or O'Neil is a far cry from a "storyteller" like Steranko or Kenneth Smith. One serves as a complement to the other, in terms of writer and artist. A storyteller seems to be the two combined. And I can't accept Gordon's opinion that writing alone (as he seems to indicate) will make a 'zine better. Even GRAPHIC STORY WORLD, certainly the most literate and intelligent 'zine going, has not forsaken artwork, nor should it. And while it's true that an editor needs a writer more than a writer needs an editor, that's no reason to publish even the most banal crap around just because the writer doesn't need the editor.

Bill Cantey
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Strnad's comments in postal progress gave me an extra laugh, being employed by that -ah- organization. He was right on some things, a little off on others. Personally, I hate those damn circulars, but I don't mind moving magazines, newspapers, and other periodicals that people have ordered and want. It's the really wanted stuff that should get the rate breaks and first attention. The cranky, old lady in charge of the branch post office is a reality; but hopefully, a fading one. The bestowal of an executive position in the postal service as a political favor often extends itself to members of a politician's family. And what family doesn't have an overaged, unmarried female who can't catch a man or hold a job? But, if Nixon doesn't do anything else, he put a stop to that. No more rank outsiders will get "mini-kingdoms" in the postal service; our insiders are plenty rank enough. On the subject of parcel post. Believe it or not, our new method of handling parcels is easier on the parcels. They go down a slide, instead of being thrown. Under the old, throwing method, we once broke a bowling ball. And that hasn't happened since we got out slide. But, I'll drop this subject without expounding on the stupid mistakes our patrons make.

Bernie Bubnis
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In recent years I never stick around a con long enough to catch any of the program. This particular con report was outstanding! The writing throughout was exceptional. The layout was crisp and the photos were actually clear -- I didn't think any fan-produced photos ever reproduced clearly in photo offset. This is a fine piece of fan history and my congrats to the folks who put it together.

Sean P. Kendall
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"The Anderson Incident" was without a doubt the best thing in the whole darned mag. It was really dramatic fiction with some of the characters of FF Control thrown in to fit the format more readily to FF. This is the first time that the real emotions of pity and hate have been invoked from me by a story in a fanzine. Many kudos for Jim Wilson for one hell of a story.

LOOK
UP IN THE SKY
CREATED BY THAT MASTER OF BIRD FICTION, IYAM WUTIYAM AND DATZ ALIYAM, HIS FATEFUL INDIAN COMPANION FROM THE MYSTIC ORIENT.
THE SMELL OF EVIL WAS ALL-PERVADING ...
IT CLUNG TO THE CITY AS A SCHROUD CLINGS A CORPSE...
IT FILLED THE AIR AND THE AIR VOLUMED THE LUNGS OF THOSE THAT DARED TO BREATHE.
AND FOR THOSE WHO STRUGGLED AGAINST THE NIGHT,
DESPERATE HOPE BECAME THE LAST RESORT.
ONLY TO BE FOLLOWED BY FIRM DESPAIR.
AND SOMETIMES BY AN EVEN FIRMER IMMOBILIZATION!
THUS WAS THE PULSATING GRASP OF EVIL.
UNTIL THE DAY WOULD FINALLY BREAK AND, ONCE AGAIN, THERE WOULD BE PEACE IN THE ALLEY.
-TO BE ETERNAL...
-HANLEY-2-71

CHAVIA
COCKRUM
'71